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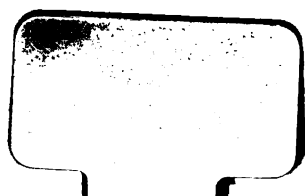
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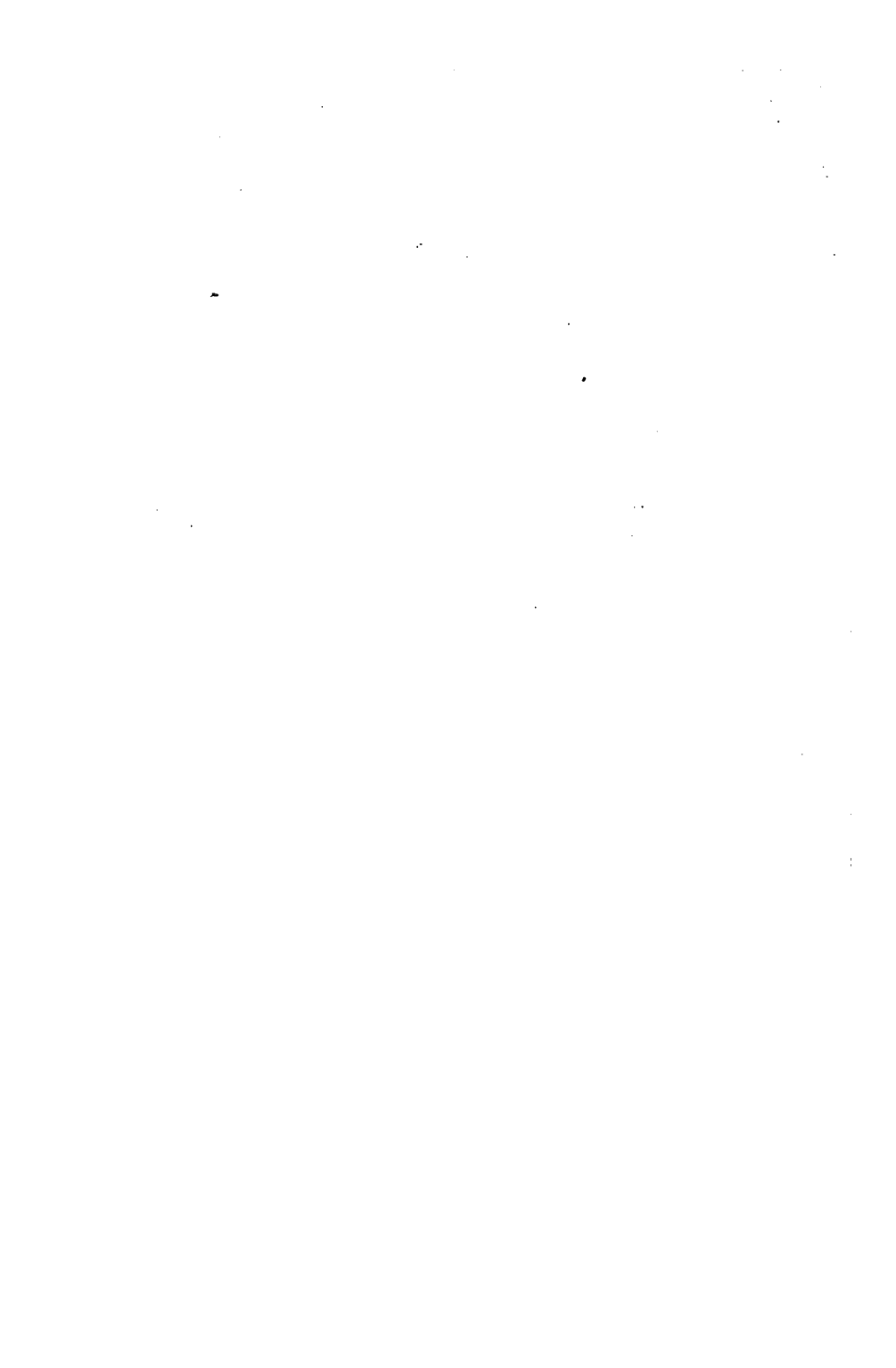
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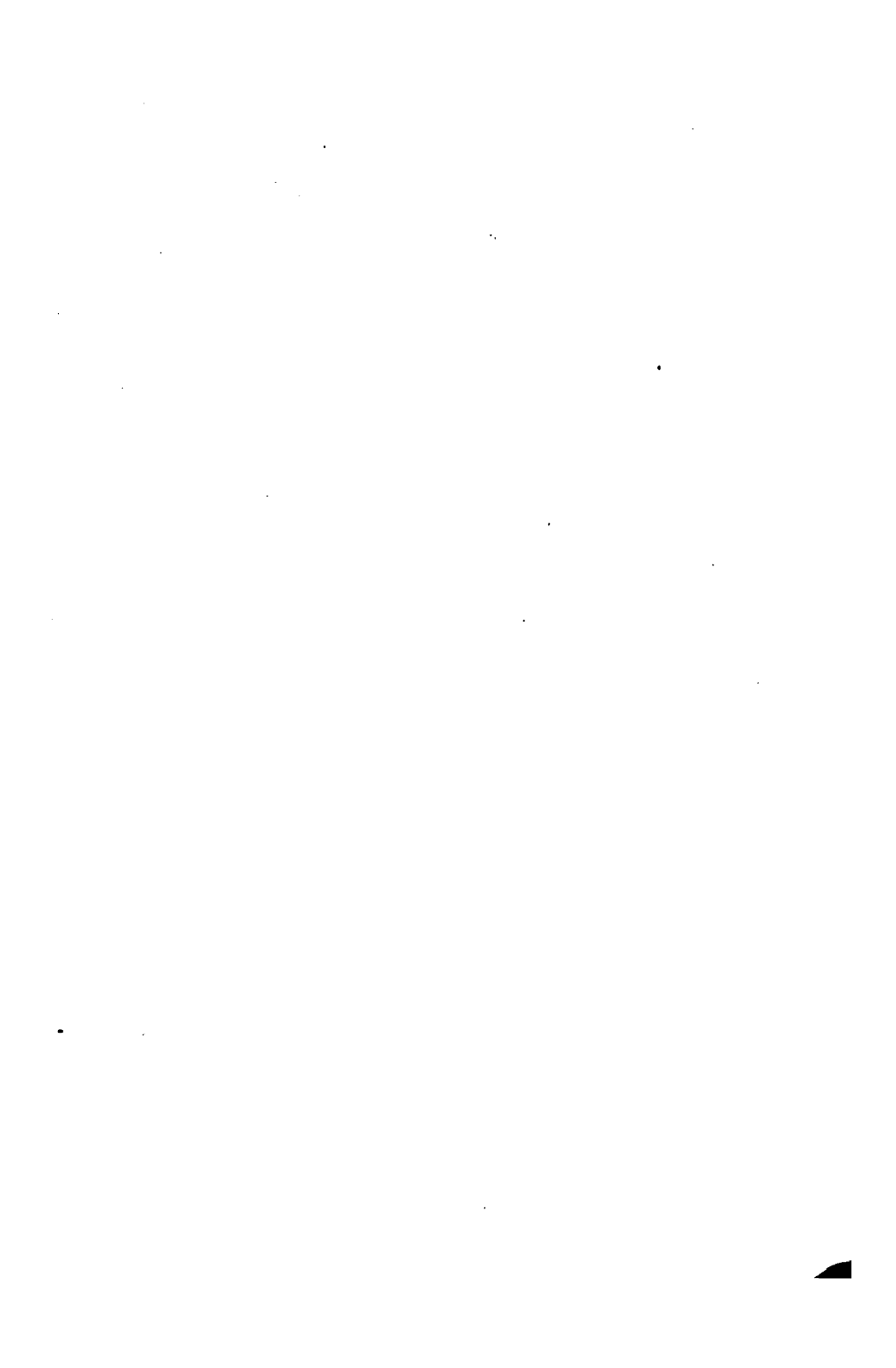
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THE HILLSIDE CHILDREN











Riseley leant back in his chair, and folded his arms over his chest in an old-mannish style.

THE
HILLSIDE CHILDREN.

BY

AGNES GIBERNE,

AUTHOR OF "FLOSS SILVERTHORN," "NOT FORSAKEN,"
ETC., ETC.



"Children at their happy play."

R. WILTON.

"They filled one home with glee."

F. HEMANS.

SEELEY, JACKSON & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET.
LONDON. MDCCCLXXVIII.

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THE HILLSIDE CHILDREN.



CHAPTER I.

HOW THE CHILDREN SAT BY THE BROOK.

"I SAY, Una."

"Yes," was the reply.

"What do you suppose makes people grow?"

"Grow how?"

"Grow bigger, of course."

✓ "Why, Risely, everybody does."

"That's no answer. And if they have to grow, why don't they go on growing always?"

Una thought the matter over in a grave fashion, while Risely pulled out his pocket-knife and began peeling a stick.

The children had chosen a pretty spot to sit in. Sweet whiffs of mown and half-dried grass came from a field near behind. A stream bubbled playfully at their feet. Sunbeams crept through the sheltering oak overhead, making a fretwork pattern of light and shade upon the mossy bank. Beyond the brook, the meadow sloped steeply upwards, hiding further view.

Una was a gentle little maiden of ten summers, dressed in a neatly-fitting print frock. She wore no jacket, and her broad hat lay on the grass. Brown hair curled thickly over her shoulders, kept back by a brown ribbon tied snood-fashion. She had brown eyes, too, with a sweet wistful look in them, and the soft flush on her cheeks was always coming and going.

Risely was a strong straight slim boy, as tall as his sister, though a year younger. He had a rosy bright face of his own, and not the least trace of her shy manner. Risely counted himself half a man already, worth any number of little girls, up to anything, and fit to speak to anybody.

"But, Risely dear, everything grows; and yet nothing goes on growing always," said Una, at length.

"Everything doesn't grow. This doesn't,"—and Risely picked up a stone and sent it skimming down the stream.

"No—I forgot. I don't mean exactly everything. I mean people and animals, and plants and trees."

"Plants and trees never stop growing," said Risely. "Look how Kirby clips the hedges, and how they sprout out again."

"But then they don't go on getting bigger than their right size. They must stop somewhere," said Una thoughtfully. For though it was often Risely who brought up fresh questions, it was commonly Una who followed them out.

"No, they don't," said Risely in a reckless way. "Plants and trees always keep on growing."

"Not bigger and bigger!"

"Yes."

"Why, Risely," and Una's face broke into a merry

smile ; "just think ! if our roses were to grow as big as this oak, and the sweet-williams as tall as a great elm. Wouldn't that be funny?"

Risely felt himself beaten, to his great disgust, but he would not allow the fact.

"A rose-tree never does grow as big as an oak," he said, "at least, not unless it is trained up tall over a house. And of course a sweet-william can't turn into a tree. Anybody could tell me that. Besides, I don't care. You needn't think *you* know anything about it. You are only a girl."

"Why don't you ask Miss Cox?" asked Una, quite ready to agree to her own ignorance, and only wanting to help Risely.

"What's the good? She only says, 'I'm busy now, and I'll tell you some other time, my dear.'"

"But if you waited, and asked her at the right time?"

"There isn't any right time. I don't believe Miss Cox knows things, and so of course she can't answer."

"O Risely!"

"It's no good O Riselying me. I asked her yesterday why the sun got to look so flat at the top and bottom when it came near setting, and she said, 'Because it always did!' And when I said that wasn't telling me why at all, she said little boys had no business to ask silly questions. As if that was a silly question! I know better."

"Do you think grown-up people ever know everything?" asked Una.

"They ought. I mean to when I'm grown up," said Risely.

"I wonder whether our Mamma did," and Una's voice dropped to a reverent tone.

"She knew lots more than Miss Cox," said Risely.

"Risely, don't you wish *very* much that she hadn't died?"

"Yes," said Risely. "We shouldn't have only Miss Cox and Nurse then."

"And perhaps Papa wouldn't be almost always away."

"I don't know about that. He is away because he has to be, of course," said Risely; "and he might have to be away just the same if Mamma was alive."

"I shouldn't think she was like Miss Cox," said Una slowly. "Not quite exactly like her, I mean. And perhaps she wouldn't have been always having sick headaches."

"I don't mind that," returned Risely with frankness. "It gives us lots of holidays."

"I like holidays," said Una. "It is lovely to be out here now. But I do want to learn a great deal; and if we're always having holidays, I don't see how we can."

"I mean to learn when I go to school," said Risely. "It is nicer to play now. And girls don't need to know much.—I say, I'm getting hungry."

"O Risely, so am I. I do wish you hadn't put it into my head."

"We'll go and ask Nurse to let us have tea early out on the lawn. That'll be fun. Come along."

Una always followed where Risely led. They went springing up the steep bank, lightly as little mountain goats. Getting first to the top, Risely swung himself over a paling and went ahead through the hay-field, leaving Una to squeeze under the same hindrance at her leisure.

She did not overtake him for some distance. Over part of the field the hay lay in neat ridges, while on the other part men and women were busily tossing still. The women wore sun-bonnets, and had good-tempered faces. Most of them smiled to see the children pass.

"I should like to be a haymaker," said Risely, when Una came up.

"I like making hay. I shouldn't like to be a haymaker," said Una.

"Why, if you make hay you *are* a haymaker. What's the difference?"

Una felt sure there was a difference, but she did not try to explain it. Risely amused himself by kicking the hay before him as he walked, and spoiling the neat ridges. It did no good, and was a pity.

At the end of this field, which went by the name of Cowslip Meadow, came a narrow lane, where the tall hedges were sprinkled over with wild pink rose-blossoms. The lane led straight to another field, and there it ended. The two children, however, stopped short of that point, squeezed their little bodies through a gap in the right-hand hedge, and found themselves in their own orchard.

It was not much to boast of in the way of an orchard, being full of rank grass, overgrown with nettles, and containing little except some straggling and crabbed-looking apple-trees. Beyond lay the garden.

Hillside, though but a small house, stood in a pretty large garden. Behind was a lawn, where a number of cocks and hens lived out their small lives, with much self-important crowing on the part of the cocks and much busy clucking on the part of the hens. Shrubby paths led round to the front, where a larger and better-mown

lawn had a bed of flowers in the middle, and was divided from the front door by a neat carriage-drive.

Kitchen-garden, orchard, and outhouses nearer at hand lay to the right, hidden by trees. To the left the garden opened out wider, with a high wall behind, and a paling and field in front. From this part of the garden the drive led between some dense bushes for a couple of turns, to the swing-gate, which opened on the high-road.

Within the house were two small sitting-rooms, one on either side of the passage, and a kitchen and pantry behind. Upstairs were Mr. Cunningham's bedroom—rarely occupied—Miss Cox' room, Risely's little bedroom, the nursery, where Una still slept with Nurse, and a tiny spare room. Above were the servants' bedroom and some unused attics.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE CHILDREN PASSED THEIR LIVES.

MR. CUNNINGHAM seldom stayed at home for more than a few days at a time. He always said business kept him away ; but some thought he might have managed to be absent less constantly, if he could better have borne the sight of his home since his wife's death.

The children never knew when to expect him. Now and then he wrote to them, but not often.

Miss Cox had been the children's governess for three years. Up to that time Nurse had had sole charge. Nurse did not much like Miss Cox, and Miss Cox did not much like Nurse ; but this arose partly from the sad fact of there being no real head to the household.

It was a bad state of things for both children, but most of all for Risely, for he was a strong-spirited boy, and he had never yet learned the great lesson of obedience. If Miss Cox were displeased with him, Nurse would pet him ; and if Nurse had reason to be angry, Miss Cox held aloof and would give no help. So Risely grew to think that *his* will was as good as anybody's, and that he might just go along his own way.

Not that Nurse meant to do harm. She was a worthy faithful woman, and she dearly loved the children. But

she did not know how to train them wisely, and she had a hasty temper, and she never could bear to see any one find fault with them except herself. This arose from Nurse's love ; but, after all, it was a poor mistaken sort of love, for she ought to have wished to see them rightly brought up.

So the early loss of their mother was a great loss to Risely, and also to Una. Though Una, as a rule, was very obedient, and hardly ever had to be punished, unless when Risely led her into mischief, and though she loved Nurse more dearly than anybody in the world except Risely, yet she often longed for a Mamma. Their home lay so much in the country, that they really had no little boy and girl friends, but Una envied the happy children in story-books, who had mothers.

Also, she could recollect her own. Risely could not, but Una could. Certain scenes stood out like pictures in her memory. There was a sort of mistiness always about her mother's face, but none at all about the warm soft hand-clasp, and the showers of kisses. She could see herself, a tiny naughty girl, first crying in the corner, and then seated on a sweet lady's knee to be talked to and forgiven. She had, too, a remembrance of kneeling beside the same lady with clasped hands, learning to say a baby-prayer. Una said that same prayer still, morning and evening. Nobody had ever taught her another.

Then there was the last time, the very last time, she had ever seen her Mamma. That would never fade away. She had been carried in, and placed on the bed, and her father had cried, and her mother had fondled her tenderly. Una could recall, too, how her Mamma had talked to her, but the things said had floated quite away.

She only heard still the closing,—“ I am going to heaven now. But Una mustn't forget what Mamma has said. Never forget, darling—never forget.”

And yet she had forgotten. She did not see how she could have helped doing so. And though she longed to know what those words had been, she never could make up her mind to ask her father. Once, she had tried a little to find out from Nurse, but Nurse she soon learned had not been in the room just then. So there seemed no hope of learning those forgotten words.

Nurse was housekeeper, and in many respects head of the house. The other servants called her Mrs. Wyatt, and she made rather a point of this little dignity. Miss Cox called her Wyatt, and that may have been one reason why Nurse disliked Miss Cox. It was a pity that so small a matter should have caused unpleasant feelings.

To Mrs. Wyatt the children ran, with their complaint of being “so hungry, they didn't know what to do.”

“Hungry!” Nurse exclaimed. “And it's only half-past four.”

“Yes, but we are really, Nursie dear,” said Una's soft voice.

“Starving,” chimed in Risely. “Do let us have tea out on the lawn, Nurse. Now do! Miss Cox has a headache, so she won't want us indoors.”

“Miss Cox has gone to bed,” said Nurse; “and she'd be a deal better up and about, in my opinion. But I've nothing to do with her, of course. It's too early for tea now, Miss Una, but you shall have it at five—anywhere you like.”

“Then we'd like it on the lawn. And please give us something nice,” shouted Risely, as he scampered away.

Una ran after him, as usual. Though the eldest herself, she always did what Risely did, and let him be the leader. By this plan she certainly avoided quarrels, for Risely could not bear not to have his own way. And Una was so fond of her brother, that she never could see any fault in Risely. With him she was happy; away from him, lonely and restless.

The dreadful idea of his going to school some day had been once spoken of by her Papa. Una could never bear even to think of such a thing. She lived for Risely, and life without Risely would become a blank. Her little mind was full of him from morning till night, and when she slept she dreamt of Risely.

So during the half-hour of hungry waiting Risely galloped about the garden, and Una ran after him, quite content to do his bidding. Now he wanted his knife, which he had dropped somewhere; then he needed the watering-can for a drooping pet plant in a shady corner. Next he proposed that the reins should be brought, for a game of "horse." But the fetching was Una's business. She went to and fro with unfailing patience, and Risely never troubled himself to thank her. Why should he? Wasn't he a boy, and wasn't she a girl? What was the good of her, if not to wait upon him?

If he did not thank her, Una certainly never looked for thanks. It was nothing to her that ten minutes were spent in hunting for the knife, that the watering-can was heavy to lift, that the reins had been left in the summer-house at the farther end of the kitchen garden, and that the day was hot. Being used to this sort of thing, it came all as a matter of course. She would have been miserable could she *not* have attended to Risely's wants.

As five drew near, signs of preparation began to show. Mattie, the rosy-faced house and parlour-maid, brought out a little low table and placed it on the lawn. She spread a cloth upon it, and put two little chairs one on each side. Then came two white plates, two mugs, a jug of fresh milk straight from the nearest farm, and an abundant supply of thick bread-and-butter. Lastly, she laid on the table two little plates full of strawberries, and two big slices of home-made plum-cake.

And then Nurse came out and made both children run indoors to wash their hands, for she always insisted on good manners. She told Risely to say grace aloud, and finally left the two to enjoy themselves.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE CHILDREN HAD A FEAST.

"DON'T let's eat too fast," said Risely. "We'll make it last as long as ever we can."

Risely lent back in his chair, and folded his arms over his chest, in an old-mannish style.

"Grown-up people don't gobble down all their food in a minute. They talk."

Nevertheless Risely cast a very hungry eye upon the cake.

"Well, why don't you begin and say something?" he asked of Una.

"I wonder when Papa will come home," said Una obediently.

"Next week, I dare say. That isn't at all a clever thing to talk about."

"I don't think I know anything clever," said Una.

"Well, you could make-believe. You could say: 'What was the name of that star we saw the other evening?'—and then I could tell you, and we could talk about the sky, like grown-up people."

"But you don't know the names of the stars," objected Una.

"I know one."

"I should like to know them all," said Una. "But, Risely, please do tell me why you think Papa is coming home. Has Miss Cox heard?"

"She wouldn't tell if she had."

"O yes; if Papa had sent us a message."

"He hasn't," said Risely. "I'm going to take *one* corner of my cake, before I eat any more bread-and-butter. Why don't you too?"

"I'd rather wait. What makes you think Papa will come, please, Risely?"

"Nothing. Lots of things are always happening next week," said Risely. "I expect he will."

"It would be very nice," said Una.

Then they ate busily in silence.

"Well,—I don't call this talking," said Risely, who had been too hard at work himself to make remarks.

"Oh, I forgot," said Una, looking guilty.

"I've been wondering what Papa will bring with him next time," said Risely.

"What sort of thing?"

"Any sort. He gave me my penknife last time."

"And he gave me a book. But he doesn't always bring presents; and it isn't for *that* I want to see him."

"I like presents," said Risely. "I like to have lots of them. If I was a man with plenty of money, I'd buy them for myself every day—heaps and heaps of them."

"But they wouldn't be presents if you got them for yourself," said Una.

"Yes, they would."

"I thought a present meant that you give something to somebody."

"I could give things to myself," said Risely. "Look, I'm giving myself this strawberry."

Risely opened his mouth, and dropped it in, as he spoke.

"You are feeding yourself," said Una merrily. "They are Papa's strawberries, and Nursie gave them to you."

"If I go to a shop and buy a knife, I can say, 'I won't give this knife to anybody else, I'll give it to myself' Can't I? Eh? Can't I?"

Risely was so excited that he nearly turned the table over.

"I shouldn't think so," returned Una. "Because you would have the money first, and if you bought the knife with your very own money, the knife would be your very own too. It would be yours till you gave it away. And if you didn't give it away, you would only just *keep* it."

"You are a girl, so you can't understand," said Risely. "I heard a gentleman say once that girls couldn't chop logic."

"What gentleman?" asked Una.

"The one with the red beard that Papa brought home once. I liked him—and it is quite true what he said," added Risely, nodding his head.

"What is logic?" asked Una.

Now that was an awkward question, for Risely did not know.

"*There's* a big strawberry," he said. "Bigger than any you've got, Una."

"But, Risely dear, what is logic, and why do people chop it?" asked Una, who had a very inquiring little mind of her own. "Is it so hard it can't be cut any other way?"

"It isn't that sort of thing at all," said Risely. "You don't know one bit."

"But what is it?" persisted Una.

"Why it's—it means that girls can't do as much as boys," said Risely.

"No, I suppose they can't," said Una meekly. "I couldn't have jumped that ditch yesterday like you, Risely dear."

"Of course not," said Risely, hoping he was out of his difficulty.

"But I don't know what 'chopping it' means," said Una.

"You'd better ask Miss Cox—that's what you told *me* to do," said Risely. "Isn't this jolly cake? Nurse knows how to cram in plums, and no mistake."

"I wonder why the rooks are cawing so hard," said Una presently.

"They always caw," said Risely.

"Not so loud. It is just as if they were scolding each other. And oh, Risely! look how the sun shines down through the tree with the shaky-shaky leaves. I wonder *why* they always shake so. Other trees don't."

"They can't help it," said Risely. "That's why. You pitch upon such stupid little things, Una. I'll tell you what *I* want to know. I want to know why the moon never comes any nearer."

"It seems near at night," said Una.

"It is always going round the world, of course. The gentleman with the red beard told me that, and so did Miss Cox. But it doesn't ever come any nearer," said Risely. "That's what I want to know—why it doesn't."

I don't see why it shouldn't tumble down to the ground some day."

Una went off into a merry fit of laughter at the notion.

"I don't," insisted Risely stoutly; "and I don't believe you do either. Anything might tumble if there wasn't something to keep it up, and there's just nothing at all to keep up the moon, that I can see. There—I've eaten my last strawberry. How slow you are."

Una had a dozen left, and she eagerly tumbled the six biggest from her plate to his.

"I don't want them," she said. "And here's a bit of my cake too. Haven't we had a nice tea to-day?"

"Perhaps Nurse will let us have it to-morrow again, if Miss Cox gets another sick headache," said Risely.

"O well, but we don't want that. Poor Miss Cox!" said Una.

The last crumbs of cake being gone, and nothing left but empty mugs, bare plates, and strawberry stalks, they jumped up and had a good race round the garden. After which they watered their own little beds under the high garden wall; and finally played a long game of hide-and-seek, which lasted till past sundown.

Then Nurse came to call them indoors, for the dew was falling. Risely protested. It would not be dark till bedtime, and he had "all sorts of things to do." Nurse gave way. Master Risely might stay out another half-hour, but not Miss Una—for Una was subject to colds.

Una's pleading look was lost upon Risely, and he dashed away. Nurse disappeared into the house and upstairs, and Una followed slowly. The dining-room, which she entered, looked forlorn; nobody had been there since dinner-time.

Una did not know what to do ; she cared for nothing without Risely. It was her way to fall into a thoughtful and sad mood when alone, and such a mood crept over her now. She sat down by the window, rested her little brown head against the glass, and began musing dreamily about her dead mother.

It was curious how much Una thought of her mother. Perhaps the true reason may have been the lack of just such tender sympathy and wise training in her life as her mother would have given. Una felt the want almost without knowing that she did so.

"Where was Mamma just then?" The question slipped into her mind suddenly ; it had never come to her so clearly before. "In heaven. Had she not said, when dying, that she would soon be there? But where was heaven? what was heaven like?" Una looked up into the blue sky, darkening in the twilight, and tried to fancy a very, very beautiful place—tried to fancy her mother in such a place, but it was not easy. "And how had she gone there? Because she was so good, of course—oh, so good!" Una did not doubt that. But what if the forgotten words, spoken to her little girl, had been something about the way to heaven—or perhaps only telling Una to be sure to go some day? Una had not thought of this before. It seemed very likely.

Tears rushed to her eyes, and she rubbed them away. How could *she* get to heaven? Was it a very easy thing? Would many people go? Not everybody, she knew, for Nurse had once said so, and she had learnt a little hymn too, which said the same. Neither Nurse nor Miss Cox ever taught the children much about religion. Una wished she knew somebody whom she could ask, how

people, little girls particularly, could get to heaven. But she felt that she could not speak to Nurse or Miss Cox, and Risely would be of no use.

Then there was nobody. Una felt lonely and sad. To think of her own sweet Mamma being away up in that beautiful heaven, and of poor little Una not knowing how to go after her there !

"Papa could tell me, of course," sighed Una. "But I couldn't ask him. O no—never."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE CHILDREN MISSED DOING THEIR LESSONS.

MISS COX came down to breakfast as usual next morning. She was young still, and she had rather a pretty pale face, with blue eyes, and smooth light hair, in plaits. The children seldom saw Miss Cox smile. She was grave at lessons, grave at meals, grave when walking out. The only thing that made her light up was the coming of a letter by post, but sometimes that made her cry too ; so Una was not glad when it happened.

Hillside life was to the young governess altogether sad and lonely. She did not love the country, for her own home had always been in a town till the death of her parents broke it up ; and children were nothing but a trouble in her eyes.

It was a pity she felt thus, for Una's loving little heart might have given her some comfort. Miss Cox did not look for comfort. She had had great troubles, and she told herself that she could never be happy again. But the children could not guess how much reason there was to pity her, and she kept everything to herself.

"Are we going to have lessons to-day, Miss Cox?" asked Risely, when breakfast was nearly over.

"Certainly," Miss Cox answered.

"I thought you might have another headache, perhaps."

The tone sounded as if Risely would not have been particularly sorry, and Una flushed up quite red, and said hastily,—

"O but we are glad Miss Cox hasn't."

"I don't like Miss Cox to have headaches," said Risely; "but I *do* like holidays."

"I never leave the lessons unless I am quite unable to sit up," said Miss Cox. "You ought to know that, Risely. I should not think of giving you a holiday to-day."

"We've had two this week," said Risely, "and two last week, and one the week before."

A nervous flush rose in Miss Cox' cheeks. She had a great dread of Mr. Cunningham thinking her health unequal to her post. Not that she had any love for Hillside in itself, but she could not live at home; indeed at that time she had no home.

"It does not often happen so," she said. "We must work hard now, to make up for lost time."

"I can't bear lessons," said Risely.

"But you want to know things," urged Una.

"Yes, but I don't like learning them," said Risely. "O look! there's the postman coming over the lawn."

Risely rushed out of the room.

"I wonder whether there's a letter from Papa," said Una. "He hasn't written for a great while. I can hear Risely talking to the postman, Miss Cox. Perhaps he has one for you too. He generally brings you a letter on

Tuesday, and he hasn't been to the house once this week, and now it is Friday."

"Two!" shouted Risely, bursting into the room again. "One for Miss Cox, and one for Una. It's from Papa. I don't see why he didn't write to me. Perhaps it's for me inside; I shouldn't wonder."

But no; there was only one short note to Una.

"MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL,

"I hope to come home next week, for a peep at you and Risely. I intend to arrive on Tuesday and stay till Thursday. Please tell Miss Cox, and ask Nurse to have everything ready.

"With love to you both,

"Your affectionate father,

"R. CUNNINGHAM."

"'R. Cunningham!' Yes, he's got *my* name," said Risely, with satisfaction, when they had spelt through the letter.

"I'm so glad he is coming," said Una.

"Miss Cox, Papa means to be here next week, and he'll stay a whole day and two nights: and he says—"

Risely stopped and stared.

"I say!"

For Miss Cox was sitting still, with a pale woe-begone face and bent head, while tears were dropping fast.

The children looked hard at her, and at one another. They did not know exactly what to say or do. Presently Miss Cox tried to say something; but instead of words there came a deep sob—such a sob as Una had never heard before—and then a second, and a third. Una

began to tremble all over, and her eyes filled with tears.

But Miss Cox rose, with her face hidden in her handkerchief, and went out of the room.

"Risely, don't go too, please," whispered Una, catching at his arm.

"Why? You're not frightened?" said Risely.

"Yes I am. I can't bear people to cry. O Risely!—what can be the matter?"

"You needn't cry," said Risely. "It isn't anything to do with you. It's only something that Miss Cox doesn't like. Perhaps she's heard some bad news. I expect somebody she knows is going to die. I shouldn't think we shall have any lessons to-day. I mean to go in the garden."

"O no, because we don't know if we may."

"I know if I may. There's nothing to do here. Come along."

"But if Miss Cox should come back."

"She won't. She'll cry all the morning in her room. And she can call us in too, if she likes."

Una held out for five minutes, which seemed to her like twenty, and then gave way—for if she had not yielded, Risely would have gone without her. Una could not stand that.

So they had a race round the front lawn, and enjoyed themselves extremely, and then they took a wider range. Presently Risely proposed a tour to the end of the kitchen garden, and, after another faint struggle, Una followed his lead. She knew they ought to be at hand, in case Miss Cox called them, but how could she do what Risely didn't like?

Once so far from the lesson-book cupboard as the kitchen garden, Risely was greatly disinclined to return.

"I think we'll just have a good race in the orchard," he said.

"O no, Risely. We ought to go back."

"Miss Cox won't have done crying yet. She's always ever so long."

"But we couldn't hear her call in the orchard!"

"Yes, we could."

Una looked doubtful.

"We could if she called loud enough," said Risely, making his way to the fence.

"But she never calls loud."

"She can get Kirby to do it for her, then."

Risely scrambled over the fence, and Una did the same. He marched along with a determined air through the long grass, and Una came close after, feeling guilty.

"It isn't the sort of day for lessons," said Risely. "It's just fit for play."

"But we shall have play by-and-by," said Una.

"Don't you think Miss Cox meant us to get our lesson-books out?"

"Of course not. If people mean that sort of thing they always say it," returned Risely. "Or they ought."

"You'll come back when we get to the end of the orchard?" pleaded Una.

"If you plague, I won't come back at all," said Risely.

Una kept heavy silence,—conscience troubling her sorely.

The end was reached. A tumble-down fence sloped sideways over a muddy ditch where rank nettles flourished. On one side a continuation of the orchard

wall made a somewhat unsafe bridge across the said ditch. The children had often left the orchard by this means, till one day discovered in the act by Nurse, during a brief visit home of Mr. Cunningham. The feat had been thereupon strictly forbidden by Father and Nurse. The wall, though low on the one side, went deep on the other side, and a fall there into the ditch might have been serious.

Risely wriggled himself to the top of the wall and sat there.

"O, we mustn't go across," said Una.

"This isn't going across—it is sitting," said Risely.

"I may sit here as well as anywhere, I suppose."

"Won't you come down on the grass?"

"No! I'll help you up here if you like."

Una declined rather dolefully.

"It's lots nicer here than indoors," said Risely.

"I am sure we ought to go back!" said Una.

"You can if you like. I told you I wouldn't if you plagued me, so I won't."

Una looked unhappy. Risely swung his legs to and fro.

"I wish I was a man," he said.

"I don't," said Una.

"You! Why, you could only be a woman."

"Why do you wish you were a man?" asked Una, after standing thoughtfully for some seconds.

"Because nobody would ever tell me I mustn't do anything. I should like to do just what I like."

"But you might do bad things," said Una.

"No, I wouldn't. It isn't bad to get over this wall. It is only that Nurse was frightened. I would get over this moment if I was a man."

Risely edged himself a few inches towards the middle.

"Only just suppose if Miss Cox has come downstairs," said Una.

Risely made no answer. He almost fancied he heard some one calling to him. He was not certain, but a naughty determination had been growing up in his heart to do no lessons that morning.

"She is sure to punish us," said Una sorrowfully.

"I mean to go into the field," said Risely all at once.

He did not want to listen to Una's voice, or to a voice in his own heart, so he jumped up on his feet, ran along the narrow wall, and sprang down on the other side.

"Now I'm *here*, so I don't mean to come back," said Risely. "You can go with me, or stay behind, whichever you like."

"O Risely !" almost sobbed Una.

"You've got to be quick. I'll be off this moment," said Risely. "I shall go a nice good race round. Good-bye."

"Stop, Risely ; don't go," said Una.

And without another word, she too scrambled up the forbidden wall, ran along like a little squirrel, and slipped safely down upon the grass.

Risely seized her hand.

"That's all right. Come on, we'll have a run. That won't take long, and there's lots of time. I mean to go by Cowslip Meadow, and see how the hay is getting on. Isn't it jolly?"

But Una ran heavily, and speed soon had to be slackened. For she knew that all was wrong, not right, and how could her laugh be merry, or her feet swift?

Once in Cowslip Field, it was not likely that Risely

would turn back. Una pleaded from time to time in vain. She could not resolve to go home alone, and face Miss Cox' displeasure—mild as that displeasure was likely to be—without Risely's support.

At dinner-time two little culprits presented themselves, one flushed, tired, and timid, the other doing his best to offer a bold front.

"Where have you been all the morning?" asked Miss Cox in an absent sorrowful way, as if she did not much care.

"We didn't mean to go so far," whispered Una.

"You went away, Miss Cox," said Risely; "and we didn't know how long you would be, and I didn't want lessons."

"That was very naughty," said Miss Cox. "I shall have to keep you in longer this afternoon. Never do such a thing again without leave."

Nothing more was said. Miss Cox hardly realised how wilfully Risely had acted; and indeed she was so much oppressed with sorrow and anxiety, as to have no spirit for thinking about anything else.

The escape from punishment was not good for Risely. The light results of his disobedience made him think lightly of the disobedience itself.

But Una could not so easily silence conscience. The remembrance of the wall lay heavily at her heart.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE CHILDREN PASSED THEIR SUNDAYS.

SUNDAY was not a very happy day to the Hillside children. The nearest Church lay three miles distant, and on bright days they liked the walk to and fro through the fields; but often the weather would not allow of their going, and then it was a difficult day to get through.

Risely indeed troubled his head little with the matter, and romped about the same as usual. But Una, though she never refused to play as much as he wished, had an uncomfortable feeling that it *ought* to be a particularly good day somehow—only how to make it so she could not tell.

Miss Cox generally read a good deal, but she did not read to the children. They had nothing wherewith to employ themselves. Una liked reading, but Risely was seldom content to see her sitting still. Also, as she only had the books which she read on other days, and which were chiefly fairy tales, she could not feel that they were any help towards a properly kept Sunday. Sometimes she wished Sunday made her as sleepy as it made Miss Cox and Nurse, but it never had that effect. It only made her uneasy in her mind.

Una opened her eyes next morning upon a sunshiny Sunday, and sat up in bed with great satisfaction.

"I am glad it is fine," she remarked to Nurse, who was nearly dressed. "I wonder whether Miss Cox will take us to Church. I'd rather go with you, because you don't mind stiles or cows, and Miss Cox always chooses the lanes when she can."

"She's like enough to stay at home," said Nurse.

"What made her cry so yesterday, Nurse?"

"Nobody knows nothing of Miss Cox' private affairs," said Nurse.

Nurse went on with her arrangements, and the little white figure sat upright in the little bed.

"Risely thought somebody was going to die."

"Maybe," said Nurse.

"It must be so dreadful," said Una.

Another pause.

"Nursie, if I ask you a question, you mustn't look at me," said Una.

"Very well," said Nurse, used to Una's ways.

"I want to know who goes to heaven?"

Nurse was so startled as to forget her promise, and wheel round. A hot little face vanished under the bed-clothes.

"Go to heaven! Well, I never," said Nurse. "What on earth has got into the child's head?"

Dead silence for a minute.

"Well, it's time for you to get up," said Nurse.

"You haven't told me," a smothered voice answered.

"Good people go," said Nurse. "Of course they do. Folks of the bad sort needn't look for it."

Una allowed her eyes to appear.

'Are you and me good, Nursie dear?'

"*I'm* not one of the bad sort," said Nurse indignantly.

"I do my duty, I hope."

"And if you didn't do it, wouldn't you go to heaven?"

Nurse hesitated—was constrained to answer, "No"—and then saw a rush of tears filling the brown eyes.

"Now, Miss Una."

"O Nursie, I know I shall never go. I'm not good."

"*You* not go!" said Nurse. "I wish everybody was as good. You're just your Mamma over again."

"Am I?" said Una mournfully. "Mamma didn't do bad things, did she, Nurse? I was so naughty yesterday. I went along the orchard wall into the field."

"Now, Miss Una! you don't say so! Along that wall! So strict as you've been forbidden too. It *was* naughty—downright and no mistake," said Nurse, in fear for the future.

"O, I *know* I'm as bad as I can be," sobbed Una, "and God won't love me if I'm naughty, and I'll never, never go to heaven."

"I'd turn over a new leaf if I was you, and never do nothing of the sort again," said Nurse. "Master Risely leads you into a deal of mischief, Miss Una, and you're the older, so you'd ought to be keeping him out of it instead."

"Mustn't I do what he asks me?"

"Not if he asks you to do wrong," said Nurse.

"But he won't stop. And I couldn't stay behind, you know."

"You'll have to learn to, if you want to be a good girl," said Nurse. "Good children always do as they're told."

"I didn't yesterday," sighed Una, "and ever so many other times too. If I begin now, do you think it will do?"

"Begin what?"

"If I never do anything naughty again, shall I be quite sure to go to heaven, and see my Mamma some day?"

"To be sure," said Nurse, looking at Una uneasily.

"I shouldn't like to die without!" said Una.

"I declare it makes me all of a creep to hear her," muttered Nurse. "You're not poorly, Miss Una, are you?" She came and felt the cool hands and brow. "No, you're all right. Don't go and fret yourself. Just be a good girl, that's all."

Una's silent resolution included more than Nurse thought. She meant to be very good—oh! so good; never to disobey again, never to say or do anything wrong. Then all would be right, and she would make sure of entrance into that beautiful heaven where her mother had gone to live. So thought Una.

But how to begin being good? The duty nearest at hand was certainly Sunday-keeping. Through the morning all was easy enough. Miss Cox seemed unhappy and ill, and said she could not manage the walk. So Nurse undertook the two children, and Una walked soberly beside her, while Risely chased butterflies.

They passed through many fields—some divided by turnstiles, some by stiles; some having cows and sheep, some green with young corn. It was a lovely walk, though rather hot. Una looked up at the sky as she went along, and thought she had never seen so deep a blue, or such pretty pure white clouds, scattered here

and there like little dashes of snow. She wondered how far heaven lay above the blue.

Presently the clear "tong-tong" of the village Church bell came ringing through the air, and Nurse made Risely walk properly on her other side. Old women and men, and farmers, and cottage children were coming from different directions towards the little old Church. Soon Una and Risely were seated side by side in the high-backed pew, where they could just catch a glimpse of the pulpit, and of the bright-coloured window, and of a few heads near at hand.

Una kept very still, found her places in her prayer-book nicely, and even tried to listen to the sermon. So when she left the Church she felt that she had been a very good little girl indeed.

Then came the walk home, and dinner. After dinner Miss Cox went to her own room, and Nurse began to doze away the afternoon in her nursery rocking-chair. Risely ran out into the garden as usual. But Una, instead of following him, turned back into the house, with a deep sigh, and went to the dining-room book-case.

It was full of old brown volumes, dusty and yellow-leaved. Una looked along the bottom row, noting the word "Sermons" printed upon the backs of several. She chose carefully the largest and dullest-looking, and pulled it out with some difficulty. Then she seated herself on the floor, with her back against the sofa, and the heavy volume supported open on her knees.

The words were long, and the sense was hard to discover. In fact, Una could find no sense whatever, but she spelt her way onwards with great painstaking.

That this was the correct way to keep Sunday, Una had not a doubt. Risely's shouts of glee in the garden were very tempting, but she held herself to her task. She travelled all down one faded page and half down the next.

By that time Una was actually growing sleepy. Gradually the brown head drooped and the eyes closed.

Nurse happened to come in, after a while, and found her so,—sound asleep, with the big volume of sermons slipping half off her knees.

"I never *did*!" exclaimed Nurse. "The child ain't herself to-day."

But all Nurse did was to place the little figure in an easier posture, to put a pillow under Una's head, and to restore the sermons to their place in the book-shelf.

After that she went away, and Una slept on till roused by Risely shouting amazed questions into her ears. She was very much bewildered, and rather ashamed, but decided to leave the rest of the sermon for another day. Risely ordered her into the garden, and she went.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MISS COX LEFT THE CHILDREN.

LESSONS really did begin on Monday morning, and Una and Risely felt that they were in for two hours of work.

But people never know what is going to happen in the next few minutes.

Una was very good and attentive. She meant to give her whole mind to her work, and to do her best. Risely, on the other hand, yawned and leant against the table, and looked like somebody who has had a very bad night. It was a curious thing that, though Risely could manage any amount of playing and racing out-of-doors, he was often a very languid and fatigued little boy indeed, when lesson-books lay on the table.

And all at once, while Una was saying aloud some French words, and while Risely was gazing at the ceiling to discover what five times nine might make, Nurse came into the room with a yellow envelope in her hand.

Miss Cox looked up, and gave a cry of fear.

"O Wyatt, is that for me?"

"It's a telegraph," said Nurse.

"A telegram! O let me see it!"

The children stared, as Miss Cox tore open the envelope, glanced at the paper, and burst into tears.

"Anything wrong, Miss?" asked Nurse.

"My sister—she is dying. I must go home."

Miss Cox sat down, hid her face, and sobbed.

"It's got to be signed, and the man paid," said Nurse.

"He's come on horseback all the way from Cowbridge."

"O don't speak. I can't attend to that—I must go home," said Miss Cox, with difficulty. "What do you think, Nurse? Do advise me; I feel so bewildered. What would Mr. Cunningham wish? I *must* see her again."

Nurse's warm heart responded at once to the appeal.

"I'd go directly, if I was you, Miss. Master won't say a word against it, and the children are safe enough with me."

"O thank you," said Miss Cox, with a deep sigh. "Please see about the messenger being paid. I must go and look out about the trains."

And the children were left alone.

"Isn't that queer?" said Risely. "We're going to have more holidays, I do believe."

So it seemed. For presently Miss Cox came into the room again, dressed for a journey, with cloak and travelling-bag.

"I want to speak to you both," she said; and they saw that her face was wet with tears. "Risely, listen to me. You know that your Papa is coming home to-morrow evening."

"Yes," said Risely.

"Nurse will tell him about my going. I would rather have waited to see him; but—it might be too late."

Miss Cox gave a sob; and Una had a lump in her own throat directly, which was uncomfortable.

"I do want you very much to be good children," continued Miss Cox in a shaky voice. "If you were to get into mischief, or hurt yourselves, I should feel so miserable at having had to leave you. I hope you will be obedient children. Risely, I know you speak the truth. Will you promise me that all to-day and all to-morrow you will do exactly what Nurse tells you, and only go where you are allowed to go?"

"Yes, I promise, Miss Cox," said Risely.

He stood bolt upright and looked her in the face, and Miss Cox kissed him. She felt relieved; for with all his faults Risely was not an untruthful boy.

"I hope you'll come back soon," whispered Una tearfully; and Miss Cox gave the little girl quite a hug.

Then she kissed Risely again, and hurried away; for the dog-cart was already at the door, with her carpet-bag behind. If she missed this train, she would have six hours to wait for the next. But happily she did not miss it.

"I mean to be a good boy to-day," said Risely, after Miss Cox was gone.

And things went smoothly all the morning.

Una felt very happy. She and Risely did exactly what Nurse told them. They played in the garden, and they had dinner, and Risely behaved so well that Nurse declared she "shouldn't hardly have known him."

After dinner she took them out for a walk, which they enjoyed much. On their return Risely wanted to go off again with Una to Cowslip Meadow. There were three or four fields round about in which the children were allowed to play freely, and Cowslip Meadow was one of these.

"Not to-day," Nurse said. "It's clouding over for rain, and I don't want to have you both wet through. You have had a nice walk, so now play in the garden. And you're not to go in the orchard, neither of you—mind that."

Risely looked at her in amazement.

"I mean it," said Nurse. "You are both to keep out of the orchard."

Risely looked offended, and marched in dudgeon out of the house, with Una at his heels.

"I wish I hadn't promised Miss Cox," he said. "If I hadn't, I wouldn't care a bit what Nurse says. Papa always lets us play in the orchard. Nurse has no right to say we mustn't."

"O Risely!" said Una, with her usual gentle little protest.

"Well, I'm not going, of course. But I would if I hadn't promised."

Una was very glad that he had. The orchard being forbidden, Risely chose perversely to go as close to it as possible. So many holidays were doing him harm, and making him wilful.

He would not play, but sauntered up and down the kitchen-garden path, looking longingly over the fence. Not that the orchard was really at all nicer than the flower-garden to play in, but just because it was forbidden Risely wanted more and more to go. And yet he would have scorned to break his promise. He was proud of having his word believed.

"It's hateful," he said at length.

"What is?" asked Una.

"Being here. I want to go and roll in the grass."

"Wouldn't it be better not to think about it?" asked Una.

"I can't help thinking."

"Suppose we have a game of ball," suggested Una.
"That would be nice."

Risely made no answer, so Una fetched the great india-rubber ball from the house, and threw it at him. Risely did not refuse to throw it back, though he seemed rather crusty still. But soon the interest of the game took up his attention, and he grew excited.

"Catch, Una, catch—don't let it drop—*run*," cried Risely.

"There it comes, Risely."

"Hallo! I've got it. Now look out."

"O don't throw so high—I almost missed."

"I've got it! But I like throwing high. Look!"

Up and up went the ball, but it came down far from Una's outstretched arms. Falling into the orchard, it rolled down the slope towards the other side.

"There now! That's always the way," said Risely, in disgust.

"O isn't it a pity?"

"You've got to get it for me."

"O no, Risely."

"You must. It's the rule. You didn't catch, so you must go after the ball."

"But, Risely dear, I couldn't catch—how could I? And Nurse said we mustn't go there."

"I mean to have it back," said Risely.

"I'll go and ask Nurse if I may go in. I needn't stop a moment, so she won't mind."

"No, you shan't. She will just say we had no business

to play so near the orchard, and tell you it serves me right to go without the ball."

Una stood silent. She did not believe Nurse would answer thus.

"It's *too* bad," said Risely. "Just as we were having such a nice game."

Una stood and looked at the ball sorrowfully. She could see it lying on the grass.

"I want it back," said Risely.

Una knew what he meant.

"You can easily just squeeze under the paling here, and get it in a moment. *You* didn't promise."

"Didn't I? But I meant it all the same," said Una. "And that would be so naughty."

"It wouldn't," said Risely. "I would go this minute if I hadn't promised."

"It would be very naughty," repeated Una, thinking of her resolution.

"I tell you it *wouldn't*," said Risely.

Then there was a pause.

"Are you going?" asked Risely.

"No," said Una faintly. It was the hardest "No" she had ever spoken.

"But you must," said Risely angrily. "I tell you I want the ball, and you haven't promised not to go, and I have."

"It would be naughty," said Una again. "Please do let me ask Nurse."

"No, you shan't. If you don't choose to go, I just shan't speak to you."

"O Risely darling!" said Una, tears coming into her eyes.

"Then you won't go?"

Una sobbed a little, but answered—"No."

Risely turned round with his back to his sister, and so stood. Una felt very miserable. It was almost *too* hard to be good; and yet if she were not, how could she ever go to heaven?

Presently Risely sat down on a big white stone, which he had once taken the pains to carry to that spot, for the purpose of a seat. Una tried to get round in front of him, but he twisted the other way, and she saw only his back. He pulled out his knife, and began hollowing a bit of stick.

"Risely, won't you forgive me?" asked Una.

"If you'll get my ball."

"I can't," sobbed the little girl.

Risely went on digging into his wood, and Una stood behind him, a sorrowful little figure. But she did not yield. Finding her firmer than he expected, Risely tried a new plan. He was in a naughty mood, and very much out of temper. Presently he worked his way round, so as slowly to face her. Una felt comforted to see his back no longer, and put away her pocket-handkerchief.

"Can't I get another ball, Risely darling?" she asked tenderly.

Silence.

"I saw such a beautiful thick stick for a boat," said Una. "It is in the garden."

Silence.

"Don't you *ever* mean to speak to me again?" asked a heart-sore little voice.

Silence still. But it was broken unexpectedly.

"I say, Una, do you know you are very ugly?"

"I didn't know it," said Una meekly. "Am I, Risely?"

"Very ugly," said Risely; and no doubt he meant it, for when people are cross, they generally think everybody ugly except themselves.

"I'm sorry," said Una. "I suppose I was made so, Risely darling."

"Nobody loves ugly people," said Risely.

"Don't they?"

"No, nobody," said Risely. "And you are as ugly as can be. You are as ugly as—as a beetle; no, I mean as a toad. And if you are nasty to me, I shan't love you, and then *nobody* will love you."

Una was greatly subdued.

"Wouldn't dear Nursie?" she asked.

"Nurse might, a little wee bit; but nobody else."

"But, Risely darling, you do love me?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Risely. "I certainly shan't if you treat me *so*."

Una's face worked all over.

"So you needn't think it," continued Risely. "I can't bear people who won't do what I ask them."

"Risely darling, you *do* love me now, don't you?" said Una again, with heaving chest.

"I haven't quite left off. But it's going."

Una was conquered, and her resolutions went to the winds. Slowly, and with her eyes open to the unhappiness that must follow, she crept through the hedge, ran across the forbidden ground, and brought back the ball.

"You're not to tell Nurse," said Risely, as he took it from her.

"Mustn't I ever?"

"Never," said Risely. "She would think it was my fault."

"I told her I had got over the wall into the field."

"Then that's why she won't let us go in the orchard. So it serves you right to have to be made," said Risely.

Una stood mournfully. She felt as if things were altogether very crooked.

Risely thought it was time to say something a little comforting, and he remarked :

"Do you know, Una, I don't think, after all, that you are so *very* very ugly. You can be nice sometimes, you know."

But Una was too heavy-hearted to be cheered. She played with him awhile longer, and then, all spirit having gone out of the game, she was not sorry to be driven indoors by a shower of rain.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW UNA WAS SORROWFUL.

ALL that evening Una felt unhappy, so unhappy that she hardly knew what to do with herself. Nurse thought the little girl's dull looks arose from her kind feeling for poor Miss Cox ; and she said to herself how sweet it was of the child. Risely grew angry because he could not rouse her to be merry, and at last he ran away and left her.

For once Una did not mind. She almost wanted to be alone. Yet, when by herself, all she did was to creep into the window-seat, and lean her face against the shutter, and have a quiet cry.

For it seemed to poor little Una that all was over. She could not be good. She had tried so hard, so very hard, and all in vain. She was just as naughty as ever. More than that, she knew she would continue to be naughty. The same thing would happen again and again. How could she ever refuse to go where Risely wished, or to do what he wanted ? How could she ever bear to see him leave off loving her ?

She had been naughty and disobedient. She could not hope to cure herself of being so. How, then, could she ever reach the beautiful heaven where her Mamma

lived? Una's tears dropped heavily, and her poor little heart was full to overflowing.

Next day, when she woke up, the weight was on her still. Not even the thought of her father's visit home could cheer her.

"Una, you are so awfully stupid to-day," said Risely, in disgust, after dinner.

"I know I am," Una answered.

"Then why don't you leave off? What makes you so? Are you cross?"

Una's eyes filled, as they had a trick of doing that day.

"O Risely, I do feel so bad," she half sobbed.

"Feel sick?" asked Risely.

"O no—it's about yesterday. I wish I hadn't got the ball. I wish I hadn't," repeated Una, as she sat upon a grass-bank in the garden, with Risely beside her.

"It wasn't any harm," said Risely.

Una kept silence for a minute.

"But it is harm to be naughty," she said at length.

"And I was naughty. And—oh, Risely darling, naughty children don't get to heaven, you know, and I'm so dreadfully afraid I shan't go."

Risely looked up in her face. "We're not naughty," he said. "I think we're pretty good, upon the whole."

"I'm not good," sighed Una. "I feel naughty all through me."

"Well, then, you've got to be sorry for it, I suppose," said Risely. "That will make it all right."

Una looked back at him earnestly.

"Are you quite sure?" she asked.

"Quite," Risely replied.

"Because—" and Una hung her head—"because I want so much to go to heaven. And if God is angry with me I can't, can I? Does He forgive people directly they're sorry?"

"Of course," repeated Risely. He had never heard Una talk so before, and he fixed his eyes on her in amazement.

"Did somebody tell you so?" asked Una.

Risely shook his head, and her hopes sank.

"Do you think everybody forgives everybody directly they are sorry?" she inquired thoughtfully.

"I expect they do," said Risely.

He pulled up a few blades of grass, and plaited them lazily together. Una was thinking with a troubled face.

"Risely, do you know Mattie told me a man killed somebody on purpose the other day, and so the man will have to be killed himself."

"Yes, people are hung for murder," said Risely, quite proud of knowing so much. "That's the law."

"What is a law?" asked Una. "I don't think I quite exactly understand."

"Why, you *must* know," said Risely. "That's easy enough for anybody. A law—a law is—a law is—why, a law is a law."

Una had no doubts on that head, but she did not seem satisfied.

"It's a thing that has to be obeyed," said Risely, "and if it isn't obeyed then their heads are cut off—no, I mean they're hung—at least some only go to jail, you know."

"Whose heads?" asked Una.

"People that disobey."

"But then, Risely, if they are very sorry wouldn't they

be forgiven? If that man that killed another man was dreadfully sorry after, wouldn't it be all right?"

Risely looked perplexed.

"But then everybody might *say* they were sorry," he said, seizing on a bright idea. "And I suppose the Queen couldn't go and forgive all of them, because you see, Una, they might do just the same over again. And other people might do it too."

Una looked very sorrowful.

"Risely, do you think nobody can't *ever* be forgiven, if they don't promise they'll never, never, do it over again?"

"No," said Risely, not taking in the extent of the question. "If I was the Queen *I* wouldn't let him off without."

"O Risely! O Risely!"

Una sobbed long, and low, and helplessly. For she could not say *that*. She could not resolve never to be disobedient again. She knew that Risely had the power to lead her many and many a time into wrong-doing. And much as she wished to be good, her love for Risely was the stronger feeling of the two.

Risely petted and scolded Una by turns, but he could not stop her tears, till she had cried herself tired, nor could he make out what it was that distressed her. The redness had faded from her eyes before she next came in the way of Nurse, but the pale cheeks and sad look could not fail to be remarked upon.

At half-past five the little brother and sister were waiting on the front gravel-path for their father's arrival. Nurse had dressed Risely in his Sunday suit, and Una in her thick white frock, with a blue sash.

"I can't think what's come to the child—looking so

miserable," she muttered. She said nothing to Una, fearing to risk another crying-fit, for that there had been one already she saw plainly. "It's Master Risely's fault, I make no doubt. He's getting that rampageous, there's no keeping him in order. He's always saying hard things to Miss Una, and she's like his little slave. It oughtn't to be so, but what's to be done?"

By-and-by the dog-cart drove quickly through the garden, and Una's face flushed, and Risely was in a great excitement. And how the children stared!

For Mr. Cunningham was not alone. Beside him sat a boy, tall and thin, and delicate-looking as any girl, with a pair of brown eyes like Una's own.

"Here we are!" said Mr. Cunningham. "Can you get down, Homer? Stay——"

But the boy sprang to the ground, and then stood leaning against the porch.

"I thought you would have been more overdone with your journey. Well, children, how do you do?"

Mr. Cunningham kissed Una, and patted Risely on the head. He was a tall largely-built man, with a high forehead and a black beard. When he was silent, his face had a very melancholy expression; but his manner of speaking was alike kind and cheerful.

"Both quite well, eh?" he asked. "They do credit to you, Nurse. Where is Miss Cox? By-the-bye, I have brought you a patient—Master Homer Granville. You remember Mrs. Granville?" he added lower.

"Yes, sir. Master Homer is like what she was," said Nurse.

"He is like this child," said Mr. Cunningham, pulling one of Una's curls, and then turning his head suddenly

away with a sigh. "Have the spare room made ready for him. Una, my dear, take your cousin into the drawing-room. Is Miss Cox there?"

"No, sir; she was called away by telegraph. Her sister is dying," said Nurse.

"You don't say so! Sad—poor thing! I'll hear particulars in a moment. Go to the drawing-room, Homer, and rest yourself."

Una held out her little hand, as if she had a notion that the new comer could not manage without help. Perhaps he hardly could. He accepted the help smilingly, and went where she led; but in the drawing-room he tottered and caught at the table, and could with difficulty drag himself to the sofa.

"Don't be frightened," he said, dropping down there among the cushions. "I'm only—done up."

Two or three long gasps came, and Homer shut his eyes. Una stood looking at him. She thought she had never seen such a white face: forehead, cheeks, lips, all without one tinge of colour, except for the brown eyebrows and eyelashes.

"Are you very ill, cousin Homer?" she asked soberly, after a minute's waiting.

Homer opened his eyes, and looked all round, as if he could not think where he was. Una felt half afraid; but when he caught sight of her, he said, "O it's Una," and smiled.

"Are you very ill?" repeated Una timidly.

"It's getting right now. The room went round like wild, when I came in."

"Wild what?" asked Una.

Homer laughed.

"You funny child !" he said.

Una did not think herself funny. She asked in her gravest tone :

"Are you always ill ?"

"I'm nearly well now ; only I get like this sometimes."

"Like what ?" asked Una, interested.

"Just as if I was floating off a thousand miles, and everything was rolling and spinning topsy-turvy as fast as possible."

"Is it nice ? Do you like it ?" asked Una.

"Well, no ; not particularly. It's queer."

"It must look rather pretty," Una decided. "Is everything spinning round now ?"

"No ; you are only dancing up and down a little."

"I wish I could see it. I don't feel dancy."

"I say, you and I will have to be great friends," said Homer.

"But I am only a little girl," objected Una, though she liked the notion. "And you are so big."

"How old are you ? Eight ?"

"Why, cousin Homer, I'm ten."

"You don't look it. Call me Homer, not 'cousin.' I am fifteen, and five years needn't matter."

"What makes people friends ?"

"What makes them ?" Homer's eyes twinkled. "Their own liking, I suppose."

"Yes ; but I mean, what *is* a friend ?" said Una.

At which Homer lay and laughed.

"O Una, we shall have plenty to talk about, I see. I'm glad I came."

Una was glad too, and wished he would go on talking.

Instead of which he put his hand over his forehead, with another long sigh, and shut his eyes.

"You don't mean to go floating away again, please, cousin Homer?" said Una nervously.

"I don't know. I feel rather like it," said Homer faintly.

And just then Mr. Cunningham came in, followed by Risely.

"O papa," cried Una, in distress, "poor Homer says he is floating off a thousand miles, and everything is dancy, and he does look so bad."

"Hey! hallo!" said Mr. Cunningham, rather alarmed, for Una's description made him almost fear that Homer's mind must be wandering. But a glance showed him how things stood, and he went out of the room, and came back, carrying a glass, which he held to Homer's lips.

"Drink this, my boy," he said. "That's it. I ought to have seen to you at once, but your aunt's warning went out of my head."

"Papa, isn't poor Homer dreadfully ill?" asked Una in a tone of intense sympathy, and Homer looked up at them with a little laugh.

"Not now," said Mr. Cunningham. "He has been so, but now he is only weak. You must be his little nurse. Ah, he is beginning to look better."

"I'm all right again," said Homer. "That sort of thing doesn't last."

"Not if we can send it away," said Mr. Cunningham.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW RISELY CAUSED SOME AMUSEMENT.

TEA was laid, and Una sat, supremely happy, behind the urn. All distresses were for the time driven away. She had never poured out tea for her father before ; but Miss Cox being absent, Mr. Cunningham decided that she was old enough to begin. Nurse had given careful advice beforehand, and Una's cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright with the weight of interest belonging to her task.

Things had a generally festive look. On common days Una and Risely used their little white mugs and plates, but the best gilt-edged service appeared to-night. Una always thought that no tea or milk ever tasted so nice as out of those prettily-shaped cups, with their wreathing of small green leaves, and their beautiful little painted humming-birds. One of Nurse's best cakes was also on the table, and a grand pile of strawberries, and Una herself had arranged a bunch of flowers, the vase being placed in the middle.

Nobody could persuade Homer to remain on the drawing-room sofa. He said he was all right again, and desperately hungry ; so he took his seat opposite Risely, and looked very white but very merry. He seemed determined not to be counted an invalid.

"Papa, do you like a great deal of sugar in your cup?" asked Una, with an intensely anxious and happy look.

"Two or three lumps, my dear."

"It depends on the size," said Homer. "I should weigh them, Una. Ask uncle how many pounds of sugar should go to each cup?"

"Pounds!" repeated Una. "Why, a pound of sugar is a great blue package, for Nurse showed it to me once. It wouldn't go into the cup at all—not half of it. I think I'll put in two lumps, and then if Papa wants more I can give it to him."

"And you can give me only one, please," said Homer.

Una obeyed, with great care. She was so long pouring out, and so busy watching to see if results were satisfactory, that there seemed danger of her own wants being forgotten.

"Papa, I've got such lots of things to tell you—you can't think," said Risely, with his mouth full of cake.

"I shall be glad to hear them—when you can speak," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, may I have a bigger piece of ground for my garden?"

"Is that what you have to tell me?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

Risely did not understand.

"May I?" he repeated. "Una's is quite enough for her, because she is a girl, but I could manage twice as much. I haven't room for my plants properly."

"I'll think the matter over," said Mr. Cunningham. "Do you want more ground too, Una?"

"I should *like* it," said Una, "because part of mine is rather crowded."

"No harm in girls being crowded, I suppose," said Homer.

"Well, I ought to have the biggest piece," said Risely. "I know I ought, because I am a boy, and Una is a girl, and I can dig ever so long, and Una gets tired."

"Couldn't you dig her garden for her?" asked Homer. Risely looked astonished.

"What for?" he asked.

"What for? Why, to help her."

"*You* wouldn't dig anybody else's," said Risely.

"That's all you know! Pretty well for a small boy," said Homer, in a comical tone. "Why, my sisters are always wanting me to do something in their gardens."

Risely was direfully offended, and would not look at Homer again for a good while. The idea of being called "a small boy!"

"How many sisters have you?" asked Una.

"Two; one nearly your size, and one a good deal bigger."

"Which is the nicest?"

"The nicest? I'm sure I don't know. I never thought about it. They are both the nicest girls that ever were."

Una wished she could have been the same.

"The biggest is like you," said Homer. "She has just your face. And the little one is like nobody."

"What is she called?" asked Una.

"Carrie. They are Alice and Carrie. Didn't you know that?"

Una shook her head. Her knowledge of her relatives was slight. She fell into a brown study about little girls in general.

"Some more tea, please," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Wake up, Mrs. Tea-maker! People who have the tea-pot should never go to sleep. Just the same as last time—no stronger."

"Papa, do you know Curiosity has been so funny lately?" Una remarked.

"Has it?" said Mr. Cunningham. "Whose curiosity, my dear?"

"It's the black hen," cried Risely, drowning Una's gentler explanation. "The black hen, Papa. She's the curiosest creature that ever was—always trying to find something inquisitive."

Mr. Cunningham and Homer laughed till the tears came into their eyes.

"It's true, and I don't care," said Risely, affronted. "She pokes into the front-garden, and gets into the passage, and cackles about everywhere. And the cocks had a fight last week—oh, such a fight! Nurse said it was just like the battle of Waterloo."

"Why?" inquired Mr. Cunningham, while Homer went off into a fresh burst.

"Why, because they fought. They did fight so, Papa. Kirby tried to part them, but they would have it out."

"Who was the victor?"

"O we were so sorry! It was young Speckles. Poor Cock-a-doodle has always been king, and now he has to scamper round and hide himself, and he only gets a good crow on the sly. And young Speckles is so dreadful conceited, Papa."

"What sort of grammar do you call that, my dear boy?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

"I don't like grammar," said Risely, "and I don't like lessons. Holidays are so delightful."

"And dunces more delightful still, eh, Risely?"

"I'm not a dunce," responded Risely with some warmth. "I know lots of things, Papa."

"I am afraid somebody else besides young Speckles is 'dreadful conceited,'" said Mr. Cunningham.

"But I *do*," said Risely. "I have learnt ever so much French and history."

"What's the French for 'Don't sneeze,' and 'Catch a cow by the horns?'" inquired Homer?"

"Of course I don't learn such stupid things as Homer says," observed Risely, looking studiously at his father. "But I'm learning a whole verb, and I've got on a great way past John in history."

"King John?"

"Yes, the one that was drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine."

Homer was in convulsions of laughter, and Mr. Cunningham's chair shook under him.

"Homer needn't laugh. I *know* he was," said Risely, turning very red. "He had to be killed, and they let him choose; and he chose."

"Did he sign the Magna Charta before or after the Malmsey wine affair?" Homer asked.

Risely kept a dignified silence.

"We've had numbers of holidays lately," said Una gently, after a little break, during which Homer grew composed.

"O heaps and heaps!" exclaimed Risely. "Because Miss Cox is always having sick headaches, and she goes to bed. And we're so glad—at least, sorry—at least, it's so capital to have holidays."

"How long has Miss Cox had headaches?"

"Why, she always does," said Risely. "Lots of times, and lately ever so much more than usual, because she had letters, and they made her cry. She has two or three every week almost."

"Letters?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

"Two or three headaches, Papa; and she can't walk with us, because she is tired. And we have such fun in the fields—oh, such fun!"

Mr. Cunningham did not doubt it; but perhaps the state of affairs seemed less satisfactory to him than to Risely. His face had a grave set for some minutes.

Tea was coming to an end.

"You had better be wise and retire," Mr. Cunningham said to Homer.

"But I am all right, hardly even tired," Homer protested. "Risely has done me no end of good. I haven't had such a hearty laugh for two months."

"We're going into the garden with Papa," said Risely. "Ain't we, Papa?"

"You little Yankee, where did you learn that?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

"I'm not Yankee, I'm an Englishman," said Risely, trying to look tall. "Papa, we *always* go in the garden when you come."

"Then, of course, you must go now," said Homer. "I mean to go with you, and have a look at these redoubtable gardens."

They had not far to walk. The two beds lay under the south wall; being in fact partitioned off with box and green stakes from the middle part of a very long bed, extending as far as did the wall itself. One of the two chiefly excelled in neatness, and the other in gaiety.

"I see no objection to your having a little more ground," said Mr. Cunningham. "How comes it, Risely, that your flowers are so much better than Una's?"

"Kirby gives us plants, and lets us choose," said Risely.

"I hope you follow the rule of polite society, by which the gentleman always gives the lady the first choice."

"I think the gentleman ought to choose first," said Risely. "*I* always do."

"I must tell Kirby to look out some good roots for Una, in that case, allowing no choice. Well—as to these gardens. How much more space do you want? Not too large an addition, I suppose. How will it be when you go to school? Una could not look after your garden for you if it were much bigger than now."

"O but she won't have me to play with then, so she'll have more time," said Risely.

"You piece of self-complacency," muttered Homer. And then he saw what the others did not see—that Una had turned aside, and was bending over some flowers, with a face over which a sudden blank despair had crept, turning it pale as death.

"Risely doesn't go yet, does he, uncle?"

"No, not yet; in fact, he is not prepared. I am afraid I have let the matter alone too long. He ought to go soon—not later than next Easter, certainly."

"It won't be yet, you see," said Homer softly, close to her ear, while Risely went on chattering to his father. "There is ever so long before you yet. Don't worry yourself now about it."

Una held his hand tightly, but could make no answer. Her poor little face worked all over, and tears fell heavily.

"It won't be yet," repeated Homer. "Easter is an immense way off. And by-and-bye you will begin to want him to go. He would never grow manly or like other boys without. But you needn't think about it yet. Just look at that smart butterfly. Seems as if he had decked himself out in holiday costume in honour of our arrival. Now you are beginning to look like my sisters again. You always do directly you smile."

"Do I?" Una said, in rather a shaky voice.

"To be sure—as like as possible. You're a jolly little girl," added Homer consolingly. "Worth fifty Riselys."

"O no," said Una with earnestness, and yet she was rather pleased.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW UNA FAILED IN HER DUTY.

MR. CUNNINGHAM gave himself up to the children next day, and a happy day they had. He sat with them in the garden, and took them for a long walk, and gave Risely a lesson in tree-climbing, and told no end of amusing stories. All the morning Homer was with them, as merry and pleasant as could be, but after dinner he broke down, and had to take to the sofa.

The day passed away quickly, as such days commonly do, and yet it seemed long to look back upon,—such an amount of talking and laughing, of asking questions and getting answers, had been crowded into a few hours.

Mr. Cunningham had a long talk with Nurse, as well as with the children. He wanted to hear everything about them, and Nurse told him all. She spoke of Risely's wilfulness, and of his tyranny over Una, and of Una's confession as to the orchard-wall, at which Mr. Cunningham said, "Ha! I'll stop *that*." She mentioned also about the many holidays and the harm they did to Risely, and about Una's fit of low spirits that day, and her wishes to be a good girl. Mr. Cunningham sighed sorrowfully at the end. He thought how different things would have been, if the children had had their mother's training.

But the children themselves knew nothing of this long talk with Nurse after they were in bed. They only knew that early next morning their father had to go away again.

"Papa, I wish you lived at home *always*," said Risely.

"I don't see why you shouldn't."

"Don't you?" said Mr. Cunningham, as he stood on the door-step, waiting for the dog-cart. "Ah, little boys don't know everything."

"But it is much nicer here than anywhere," said Risely. "And if you were here you could teach me to climb higher trees every day."

"If I were at home I should expect to have an obedient little boy," said Mr. Cunningham.

Risely grew red, and looked another way.

"Do you think I should find one? Are you always obedient?"

Risely was very glad to see the dog-cart come driving round from the stable, with the white horse shaking his mane and looking much excited.

"O papa, Blackfoot is in a great state, isn't he?"

"I should not wonder if he has been too idle lately," said Mr. Cunningham. "Very bad for horses and little boys. It makes them naughty."

"Papa, you'll come again soon, won't you?" asked Una.

"I hope so, my little girl. Now I must say good-bye to you both. Don't cry. Have you any message to send to Miss Cox, if I see her before you do?"

"Please take her a kiss from me," said Una, "and a great deal of love. And I do hope her sister won't die."

"Papa, how are you going to see her?" asked Risely.

"With my two eyes."

"Yes; but I mean—she doesn't live in London. I thought you were going to London."

"So I am."

"And are you going to where she is? Or is she going to London too? What will you see her for, Papa? Is it business?"

"Good-bye," said Mr. Cunningham, smiling. "I expect you have been taking a lesson from the black hen, my boy."

"I haven't," said Risely; but Mr. Cunningham stepped up into the dog-cart, nodded a farewell, and drove away.

Una looked after him mournfully.

"I wish nobody ever went away. O I do wish they didn't."

"Well, there's no need to cry," said Risely. "He'll come again soon."

But that was not very much of a comfort at the moment, and Una went back into the house, feeling melancholy.

Una found herself soon in a difficulty. She had promised her father to be Homer's little nurse, and she liked Homer, and liked to be with him. But she did not like to be away from Risely, and Risely strongly objected to losing his companion. Homer seemed more unwell than on his first arrival; and he lay on the dining-room sofa a good deal, or only dawdled a little about the garden. Risely, on the contrary, wanted to be running about here, there and everywhere, and he could not be content without Una.

As usual, Risely had his way, and Una followed his

lead. She felt very uneasy in mind ; but Homer saw nothing of his little cousins, except at meal-times, all Thursday and Friday. Perhaps he found it dull, for on Saturday he did not look very bright, and once he said to Una,—

“I thought you and I were to be great friends.”

“Risely won’t let me stay in,” said Una sadly.

“Won’t *let* you !”

“O but I can’t vex him,” said Una in alarm.

“Very well,” Homer answered, and he said no more.

That evening, however, Nurse took the matter up, and while putting the little girl to bed, she remarked,—

“Miss Una, you are *never* with your cousin. I do think it’s unkind of you. He is poorly and weak, and he wants amusing. It’s dull for him to have nobody but me.”

Una was miserable at the bare idea of having seemed unkind.

“It’s Master Risely’s doing,” continued Nurse. “He can make you do pretty near anything he likes. I do wonder at you, Miss Una, giving in to everything that’s wrong, like you do. I thought you were going to leave off running after him so, and be a good girl ; but I don’t seem to see any difference !”

“I can’t bear to make Risely angry,” said Una plaintively. “O Nurse, has Homer really thought me unkind ?”

“I don’t doubt he has,” said Nurse. “He’s come here to pay you a visit, and Miss Cox is away, and his own sisters ain’t here. It’s your business to look after him, and not be thinking of nothing but your own pleasure.”

Nothing but Risely's pleasure, would have been nearer the mark.

"Must I stay with him all day long?" asked Una, sighing.

"There's no need for that. It isn't right that you should *leave* him all day long," said Nurse. "Why, Miss Una, you don't know how ill he's been, or maybe you'd want more to do something for him. He was as near dying as could be."

Una looked very grave.

"Was he? Nurse, did he tell you?"

"Master told me. He said none of the doctors thought to get Master Homer through. And his sisters were pretty near broken-hearted, they're so fond of him. I wonder what they would think of you, Miss Una, for taking no better care of him."

"O Nurse, don't say any more, please. I *will* be good," said poor Una, with heaving chest.

"So you've said before—many a time," responded Nurse.

"But I will this time. I didn't know that poor Homer had been so very very ill. I won't be unkind to him."

And Una crept into bed, hid her face under the clothes, and between thoughts about Homer, and thoughts about Risely, cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE SUN WAS VERY HOT.

NEXT day was fine, and the two children went to Church in the morning. Una was determined after dinner to stay with Homer, and as a first measure she hid herself to escape Risely's opposition. She heard him shouting her name about the passage, not far from her hiding-place, and her heart went pit-a-pat so loudly that she almost thought he must hear. But he took himself off without discovering her, and then she crept out to find Homer.

It seemed as if Homer were playing the same game. Where could he be? Una hunted over the house in vain, and searched the garden in vain likewise. Suddenly she heard a "Hallo," and Homer plunged out of some very unlikely-looking bushes.

"Why, Homer, what were you doing there?"

"I wasn't doing anything just there. I was on the grass bank beyond. Didn't you call me?"

"Yes; but you weren't on that bank a few minutes ago."

"No. We have been dodging one another, I suppose. What do you want?"

"May I be with you this afternoon?"

"To be sure. I should like nothing better. Where shall we go?"

Una pondered, gazing on the ground.

"Risely might find us here or in the house," she said. "And if he does, he will want me so much to go away with him."

"He doesn't allow you much peace."

"But I like it," said Una. "Only I want to be with you too, and you see I can't do both, because he won't sit still. He might find us in the orchard or the fields. There is such a nice place by the brook, beyond Cowslip Meadow—only it is too far for you. Risely and I must not go there alone, so he could not come after us."

"Does he keep to bounds strictly?"

"Papa told him once that if he didn't he wouldn't go out of the garden any more, so I think he is afraid. But that is too far."

"How far?"

"A whole lane, and two fields off, and a little bit more besides. And Cowslip Meadow is such a great field."

"I can manage that."

Una looked doubtful.

"All right, Una. Lead ahead. We may as well get out of the little chap's reach."

Homer took her hand as he spoke. He always thought of her as younger than she really was.

"Do you mind a hedge, because that is a shorter way?" asked Una.

"I don't think I can leap it yet, but I'll try if you wish."

"O no. It's a hole, and we squeeze through. It is a pretty big hole, and you are so thin," said Una, studying him.

Homer laughed, and repeated, "All right."

So they went through the orchard, dived under the hedge, and paced side by side along the lane. There was no haymaking in the fields that day, being Sunday, and little hay lying about, for nearly all had been gathered in. Not a cloud could be seen in the blue sky, and the sun beat down hotly on their unsheltered heads. Country-bred Una thought nothing of it, and Homer said nothing, whatever he thought.

Una lost herself in a brown study, chiefly about Risely. She wondered what he thought of her disappearance. The little pathway under their feet was dry and cracked with summer-heat, and the newly-mown grass had a comfortless look; otherwise, Cowslip Meadow had something pretty about it—only it lacked shade. Homer would have given a good deal for a single tree half-way, but he could not resolve to disappoint Una by turning back.

After a while turning back would have been worse than going on. Cowslip Meadow was at last left behind.

"There's only a little bit more," Una said. "Just where you see that clump of trees, Homer. There's a bank that slopes down to the brook. Risely could not see us there, even if he went down to the bank in the meadow—down to the water, I mean. You see, don't you?"

Homer was too dizzy to see much of anything, but he went on resolutely with his hand on Una's shoulder, following where she led. Una had noticed nothing yet, but the staggering fashion in which he came down the bank,

and dropped flat on the grass, made her look at him in alarm.

"O Homer! O I am so sorry! I *did* think it was too far."

The tone was one of such deep distress, that it roused Homer. He sat up, drew Una down beside him on the grass, and kissed her two cheeks.

"There! don't you worry yourself, Una. It isn't anything."

Una did not answer at once, and he too was silent for a minute or two, with his elbow on his knee, and his hand pressing his forehead. His lips had just the same whiteness as on the first day of his arrival.

"You are not better a bit," she said sorrowfully. "Is everything dancing about?"

"Never mind. It will go off."

"O Homer, I do wish we hadn't come."

"I am glad we have. This is the prettiest place! Do you and Risely play about here much?"

"Not just here. We mustn't come farther than Cowslip Field. Risely is always wanting to do it."

"But you have this brook in Cowslip Field. Don't you ever manage to drown yourselves in it?"

"Why, we couldn't," said Una. "It is not deep enough."

Homer's disengaged hand played with the ends of Una's brown hair.

"You can't think how like you are to my sisters," he said. "I feel as if I had one of them here."

"But they are very very nice," objected Una.

"So are you."

Una shook her head.

"Risely told me I was ugly."

"I shall have to haul over that small piece of goods some day," muttered Homer. "He wants bringing to his bearings. The ugliness resides in another direction."

"Please, don't tell him I told you."

Homer made no promise, and indeed no answer.

"Don't you feel any better, Homer?"

"O yes,—by-and-by."

The "yes" could hardly refer to the present. Una sat and looked up at him sorrowfully. So much as she could see of his face below his hand had no trace of colour in it. Una wondered if he could have looked much more ill when he was at his worst—when he was nearly dying. She did not remember ever seeing anybody look so ill before. Miss Cox had not been rosy, but that was different.

"Why, Una," said Homer suddenly, glancing up, "my dear child, don't look so doleful. Your chin will grow down to the grass by-and-by, and trail on the ground. Didn't you ever see anybody with a headache till to day?"

Una's attempt at a laugh ended in tears.

"I didn't know your head ached. Does it, Homer? Does it much? I am so sorry. O Homer, it is all my fault."

"You dear little goosie, it is nothing of the sort," said Homer, patting her cheek. "It is all the sun's fault. I had no business to venture; but I fancied I was up to it to-day. It is nothing, Una; don't cry."

"Miss Cox didn't look like you when she had a headache," said Una, just a little comforted.

"Perhaps she hadn't just come out of a brain-fever, like me."

"Was it brain fever, Homer?"

"I don't know; something like it, I believe. Come, I want to know how you spend your Sundays. You must talk and amuse me. What do you do with yourself?"

"I don't think I do anything," said Una. "At least, I only play with Risely. I haven't anything else to do. I have got some story-books, but most of them are about fairies; and I shouldn't think that was proper for Sundays,—is it?"

"Not exactly. You don't care for reading, do you?"

"O yes, I *do* like it so much. At least, I like some books. I tried a real big sermon one day, and it was so hard; I couldn't understand it. I wish I liked sermons, because I want to be good."

"I don't like all sermons," said Homer, finding it difficult to keep down a smile. "I like some, I suppose."

"I only tried one," said Una, "and I went to sleep over it."

"So you do like reading of a sort. But I never see you read."

"Risely won't let me. He wants me for play."

"Risely seems to get his own way pretty much in everything," said Homer.

"He hasn't got me this afternoon," Una meekly suggested.

"What makes you so fond of Risely?"

Una had no explanation to give. Her face glowed.

"Well, I like you the best of the two," said Homer.

Una was silent, doubtless considering the choice one

of bad taste on his part. She wanted to bring out an idea working in her mind, and did not quite know how. It came to the surface suddenly.

"Homer, were you very ill lately?"

"Yes."

"Very, very ill?" repeated Una. "Nurse says so. She says you almost died. Did you?"

"Yes."

"Almost *died*!" repeated Una earnestly. She could not quite make out his face. Part was hidden.

"Yes."

"But you didn't know it."

"Yes, I did."

"Not when you were so bad?"

"Yes. It was two or three days. I was myself most of the time."

"And you *knew* you were almost dying?"

"Yes. I didn't think it would be only 'almost.'"

"O Homer!"

Una's voice had a sound of awe-stricken pity.

"I couldn't help seeing. And I asked one of the doctors——"

"And did he think so too?"

"He didn't think I should live till next day. Carrie came in to say good-bye to me at night."

"Good-bye!"

"Yes. Nobody thought she would see me in the morning. She was too little to be called up."

"And—did Carrie cry?"

"I don't remember much. I was awfully weak."

"But, Homer—oh, poor Homer! and you thought you were dying!"

"I don't see that I was 'poor,'" muttered the boy.

"Weren't you dreadfully frightened—oh, so dreadfully frightened?"

"No."

That answer startled Una not a little. She gazed at him in utter surprise. A half-grave, half-shy smile came to Homer's lips.

"*Not* frightened?"

"No."

"Not frightened to think you were dying. O how very very good you must be."

CHAPTER XI.

HOW HOMER HAD TO TALK.

HOMER found he was in for more than he had expected. He had a boy's reserve in speaking on religious matters, and Una's questions were not easy to face. He knew he had not come to the end of them.

It would not be difficult to put her off. His head was aching severely, and talking made it worse every minute. He was greatly tempted to plead the good excuse he had at command. On the other hand, he had a feeling that his little cousin ought not to be checked. She might be less inclined to give him her confidence at some other time.

"I think Mamma wasn't frightened," said Una. "But then she was so good—oh, so good. Not like me, you know. But I didn't know boys could be so good."

"I am not good," said Homer.

"I think you are," said Una. "You must be, because Nurse says only good people go to heaven. And I think *she* feels good enough to go, and Risely says he is pretty good too. But I'm not."

"There is nothing about 'pretty good' people getting to heaven in the Bible," said Homer.

"Must they be quite—quite—quite good?"

"Yes. They must be holy. It means that."

"I can't be perfectly good," said Una, with dropping tears. "I can't be ever so little good. Homer, did you feel very good when you were dying?"

"No; I never knew till then how bad I had been. Everything I had ever done looked naughty out-and-out, Una."

"And you weren't frightened?"

"No."

"Homer, were you too ill to think at all?"

"No; I remember thinking—"

"What? O Homer, tell me what?" as he came to a pause.

"About seeing Mamma soon."

Una only just caught the words.

"But *why* weren't you frightened? Won't you tell me? I do so want to know."

"What makes you want to know?"

Una hung her head.

"I don't know how to get to heaven. And Mamma is there."

Homer could understand that. His mother was "there" too. A flush of colour and pain came up into his face.

"Una, don't you know that nobody can get to heaven except through JESUS?"

"I don't know."

"Hasn't anybody taught you?"

"Miss Cox makes us learn the Catechism sometimes."

"Nothing else? But you know all about the Lord Jesus Christ? You *must*, Una."

"Yes," said Una doubtfully. "I suppose I do,—but I don't think I know much."

Then a pause.

"Homer, please, I can't understand why you were not frightened."

"Because of the Lord Jesus."

"But *why*?"

"He had died for me, and I had given myself to Him. I knew I was safe," said Homer, flushing again. "He loves me, and I knew I was forgiven. There wasn't anything to be afraid of. He was there with me."

"Where? He was where, Homer?"

"In the room."

"The room where you were ill?"

"Yes."

"But how could you know?"

"I knew. I don't think I can explain."

"You couldn't see Him?"

"Not as I see you. I knew He was there."

"*How* could you know?"

"I felt Him—holding me up. It was just like that. And He has promised."

"Promised what?"

"Always to be near those who love Him."

"And He *was* near?"

"Yes."

"Homer, do you love Him?" The little girl looked very thoughtful.

"Yes."

"What makes you?"

"I don't see how any one can help loving Him."

"Does everybody?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"People don't know Him. They can't till they come to Him."

"And don't they come?"

"A great many don't."

"But you know Him?"

"A little."

"Not much?"

"Enough to make me love Him. Una, you mustn't repeat a word of all this."

"Not even to Risely?"

"No. Not about me."

"I won't. Homer, did you come to Him before you loved Him?"

"Yes."

"How did you come?"

"Praying is coming. Don't you know that? Real prayer, I mean."

"And are you quite sure to go to heaven because you love Him?"

"No; but because He loves me."

"But you *do* love Him?"

"Yes; I told you so."

"Why?"

"I told you."

"I don't see why."

"Because He loves me. And because He died for me. And because He has forgiven me."

"Forgiven you what?"

"Everything I have done wrong. Una, you *are* a questioner."

"O Homer, you don't mind, do you? I never had anybody to tell me before. How can you tell that He has forgiven you?"

"I know it."

"*How*, please, Homer?"

"He has promised, and He can't alter. And—I think He told me."

"Told you He had forgiven you?"

"Yes; He tells people in their hearts. You'll understand some day. Just try for yourself. Una, my head is so bad, I don't think I *can* talk any more."

Homer laid himself back again flat upon the grass.

"I'm so sorry. Have I made you talk too much? Can't I get anything for you?"

"No; I'll lie still. That is the best thing. You can run about near, if you like."

Una was not in a mood for running about. She sat and waited, and thought; now and then stooping forward to watch Homer anxiously. He had turned away from her, and thrown his arm across his forehead; but she had a glimpse of a flushed cheek and two brown eyebrows drawn together with pain. That troubled her a good deal. She did not know what Nurse would say.

The afternoon was creeping away. While they had talked the sun had sloped away towards the west, but with no signs as yet of lessening heat. Some rays came slowly round and touched Una. They would have touched Homer's face next, but she moved between, and acted as a screen. Homer knew nothing of it. Una hoped he was asleep, and would not risk disturbing him. It seemed to her a very long time before he remarked,—

"I say, have you been here all the while?"

"Yes. Are you better, Homer?"

Homer drew out his watch. :

"Five o'clock," he said, and shut his eyes again.

"O we ought to go back. Tea is at five, and Nurse will wonder where we are."

"Why, Una, you are in the sun."

"I don't mind. I thought it would come on you."

"You dear little thing!"

Homer pulled himself to his feet, and went unsteadily a few paces up the bank, but only to lie down again there on the grass.

"I am sure your head aches still," said Una sadly.

"Yes; it hasn't ached so for weeks," said the boy.
"Never mind; it isn't your fault."

Una felt that it *was* her fault, and had a mountain load to bear in consequence. She stood looking down mournfully upon him, wondering whether she ought to go away and call Nurse. But was he fit to be left?

"You want to get home, don't you?" said Homer suddenly. "Poor Una! It is too bad to keep you here. Don't look so miserable. I'll come."

"O Homer! Can you really?"

Homer made no answer in words. He found his feet slowly, and took Una's hand.

"No other way home, I suppose?" he said, as they reached the stile into Cowslip Meadow.

Una considered.

"We can't get over the brook," she said. "And to go all round this field would be ever so much longer, and not a bit more shady. Does walking hurt your head?"

"Never mind."

Homer crossed the stile, and gave Una a helping hand. She took it a little in surprise, not being used to such attentions from Risely. Beyond, the sun beat dazzlingly into their eyes. Homer sheltered his as best he could, and Una minded it only for him. There was no breath of wind, and the air quivered hotly over the distant grass.

Little was said by the way. Once or twice an anxious look or word from Una brought an "All right!" from Homer, but his face showed things to be in no such condition. He lagged more and more till Una thought the end of the second field never *would* be reached. The shady lane was a relief, but by the time they were in the garden Homer could hardly see where they were going.

"Why, Master Homer!"

Nurse, watching at the front door for their return, exclaimed in some alarm as they came up. Homer made no answer. He went with an uncertain step towards the drawing-room, feeling his way by the wall, and threw himself down not on the sofa but the floor.

"Master Homer!" repeated Nurse, following him in. "Miss Una, what is the matter?"

Una tearfully explained. Nurse felt his hands with a grave expression. She could hardly catch sight of his face. He was lying with his forehead pressed hard upon his arm.

"Master Homer, hadn't you better get up on the sofa?"

Homer made no answer. Nurse tried gently to lift his head, and he muttered,—

"Don't. I can't move."

"Is the pain so bad?"

"Yes. Don't talk to me, Nurse. Don't say anything. Send Una away."

"O no, please," said Una.

"Send Una away," repeated Homer.

Nurse left the room without obeying, and brought back some lotion. Two or three spongefuls, soaking the brown hair, and dripping down on the carpet, made him turn his face more upward, with a sigh of relief.

"Thank you. That is nice."

"You haven't the giddiness back again, Master Homer?"

"Yes. It is just wild," said Homer, opening his eyes and closing them again. "Nurse, do send Una away. She wants her tea."

"And Master Risely wants her," said Nurse. "Yes, go, my dear. Master Homer is better quiet. He mustn't talk for a while."

"Isn't it any better yet?" asked Una sadly.

"It will be soon," said Homer. "Don't worry yourself, Una."

"You had better go, my dear," said Nurse, as she lingered. "Just pull down the blinds first; and don't come back till I call you."

CHAPTER XII.

HOW RISELY WAS DISPLEASED.

"WHAT's the matter? Where have you been all day?" asked Risely, as Una came into the dining-room. He had begun his tea, without waiting for other folks.

"Beyond Cowslip Meadow," said Una.

"That's against rules."

"Homer was with me."

"Where is he now?"

"In the dining-room. The sun has made him so ill," sighed Una. "And I feel as if it was all every bit my fault."

"Serves you right for leaving *me*," said Risely, with lofty displeasure.

Una did not know what to say in self-defence. She knew that no excuses would serve, yet she could not feel that she had been wrong to stay with her cousin. Tea was taken in silence, and Risely then briefly told Una to "get her hat and come along." Una obeyed meekly, though much wishing to know how Homer was.

Risely allowed her no time to inquire. That something had happened to vex him, over and above her own absence, Una felt sure; but she could not guess what.

She had not long to wait in ignorance. Risely

marched ahead through the garden, and straight on to the farther end of the orchard, Una following submissively all the way. It happened that she had not been to this spot for two days past. Neither had Risely, till that afternoon.

"There!" said Risely.

Una looked at him, and said,—

"What?"

"There!" repeated Risely.

"I don't see anything."

Risely pointed to the wall which went across the ditch. Behold, it was crowned with a treble row of sharp iron spikes, pointing fiercely upward and to either side.

"Did Kirby do that?" asked Una, rather pleased.

"Yes; he says Papa told him. I don't believe it. I believe it's him and Nurse."

"I think I am glad, because now we *can't* go across," said Una.

"Can't we? But I mean to go across some day. I won't be beaten."

"O Risely! you couldn't. It would be dreadfully dangerous."

"I shall, though. It's mean of Nurse,—just to get her own way. I *hate* those spikes, Una."

The cause of his ill-humour was now clear to Una's eyes. She was perplexed how to meet it. He sat down to look at the spikes, and she could not coax him away. He was a moody and, to speak truth, an unpleasant little boy that evening. Una clung to him dutifully, but did not find much pleasure in his society. She was not sorry when bedtime came.

Homer had gone upstairs to his own room by that time. Nurse came to see Una, and spoke cheerfully, for she did not want Una to know how anxious she felt. She was very much afraid Homer would have a return of his illness. Una did not know, until she woke up next morning, that one of the other servants had slept in Nurse's bed, and that Nurse had never left Homer's side all through the night.

He was still so little better that Nurse almost resolved to send for the doctor. It was a long way to send, however, so she waited still, and about the middle of the day he fell asleep.

That made all the difference. Nurse gave the children their dinner early, and sent them off to play in Cowslip Meadow. They did not come back till quite late, for Nurse had their tea carried out to them, which was a great treat. Risely forgot all about the spikes and grew quite good-humoured again—till the sight of them on the way home brought back unpleasant feelings into his mind.

Homer slept for hours, and when he woke up the headache was gone. Nurse was much relieved, for she knew he had had a narrow escape of something worse. She was glad, also, that she had sent no letter to alarm his father and sisters.

Una saw nothing of Homer all Monday morning, for Nurse was determined to keep him quiet. But, about the middle of the afternoon, Risely being for once busied elsewhere by himself, she came alone to the front garden and found Homer on the lawn. He was snugly arranged with sofa-cushions and railway-rug.

"Hallo, Una! Where are you going?"

"O Homer, I am so glad you are out. I wanted to know how you were."

"Pretty nearly all right again," said Homer, as she dropped down on the grass beside him.

"Nurse did just let me creep in for a peep this morning, when you were on the sofa. But you were so sleepy you would hardly look at me."

"Could hardly," said Homer.

Una sat and watched him, with thoughts working beneath her gravely-set lips.

"I had a letter from my father this morning, and he says I may stay on, if I'm better for the change, and if nobody minds."

"O, that is nice. But I don't think you are better yet."

"I shall be in a day or two. Do you know you are going to have tea on the lawn?"

"Risely told me," said Una in an absent tone. And after a minute she said softly, while her fingers played with some daisy-blossoms, "Nurse thought you were going to be ill again—Monday night."

"Yes, so did I."

"Weren't you frightened?"

"No," said Homer.

"Not the least little bit?"

"No. I did not want to be ill," said Homer. "I was not frightened."

"I should have been," said Una.

"No; not if you knew you were safe."

"O but I *don't*," said Una quickly and low.

"I say, Una, how often do you read the Bible?" asked Homer.

"I haven't got one of my own," said Una. "At least, I *have* one, but Papa keeps it locked up till I'm older. And it is such a beauty ; oh, such a beauty !"

"But don't you ever read the Bible at all ?" asked Homer.

"Miss Cox reads it at prayers," said Una. "And there is a little Scripture Question Book ; and we learn the answers—only not often ; and I don't think I know what they mean."

"How do you think you are to know anything about the way to heaven if you don't read the Bible ?" asked Homer. "It's all there, and nowhere else."

"Nobody ever told me," said Una sadly.

"But, Una, you know about the Lord Jesus—about His being crucified ?"

Homer raised himself on one elbow, looking down into the sweet and anxious little face lifted towards his own.

"I don't think I know *why* He was," said Una. "Nobody ever told me, Homer."

"Just because He loves you."

The short and straightforward answer had a great deal in it. Una's eyes filled.

"Me ?" she said.

"Yes ; you yourself. He knew all about you beforehand. He died for *you*, all those years ago," said Homer gravely ; "so that you might be able to go to heaven."

Una was very intent.

"Couldn't I go if He hadn't died ?"

"No, nobody could."

"Why ?"

"Because if He had not borne the punishment for us,

we should have to bear it for ourselves. He has borne it now for everybody that will *let* it be so."

"*I will*," Una whispered.

"Then just tell Him so," said Homer. "Tell Him, and ask Him to help you. He is always near, you know. And He loves you, so you needn't be afraid."

"I don't see how you know that He loves me," said Una.

"He is full of love to every one," said Homer.

"Risely told me once that nobody would love me because I was ugly."

"Risely said what wasn't true. But that would make no difference. JESUS would love you."

"And you are sure He does," said Una. "Quite perfectly sure?"

Her poor little heart had not known very much of tender love from others.

"Yes, perfectly. He died for you," said Homer again. "He said Himself that a man couldn't show greater love than by dying for his friends. And He tells everybody to come to Him, and be saved. You are one of *everybody*, I suppose."

"Yes," said Una.

"And the Bible says, 'Whosoever,' too—'whosoever will,' is to come. You must be meant by 'whosoever.'"

"Yes," said Una. "But Homer—"

"Well?"

"Mustn't I *promise* never to be naughty again?"

"You can't promise that. Only, if you are His, you will set yourself to leave off wrong things, and fight against naughtiness. You couldn't belong to Him, and just go on living anyhow, you know."

"I can't leave off being naughty," said Una mournfully.

"Why not?"

"I tried one day—so hard—and I couldn't."

"But I dare say you didn't ask God to help you that day?"

"No. Must I?"

"Of course. You can't make yourself good, any more than you can make yourself safe."

"Risely wants me to do things, and I must do them."

"Wrong things?"

"Sometimes," said Una, under her breath.

"Then there isn't any *must*."

"He gets angry."

"Let him. *That's* a point you will have to settle," said Homer, looking at her. "It would be worse to make the Lord Jesus sorry, than to make Risely angry. He loves you more than Risely does."

"O Homer, I don't think I love Him one bit," said Una, in distress.

"You don't know Him yet," said Homer quietly.

Una's face was wet with tears. She jumped up, and ran away to the house, without a word. For Risely was coming, and Una did not want to be asked what was the matter.

Una had another reason too. She said nothing to anybody, and nobody saw her. But she went up to her bedroom, and shut the door, and knelt down by her little white bed.

Una remembered what Homer had said about the Lord Jesus Christ being "always near." Was He looking and listening then for what she had to say? A feeling of

awe crept over Una, and then she recollected that she need not be afraid, because Jesus loved her. And she put her face into the bedclothes, and asked softly for what she wanted.

That was the first real prayer which Una had ever prayed. It was not clever or grand, and she used no long words. She just whispered gently how she wanted to be sure of heaven, and not to be afraid to die, and how she wanted to have all naughtiness forgotten, and to be able to feel as Homer did, and how she wanted to be good, and not to do wrong things any more to please Risely. And Una believed that she was heard.

It seemed as if something of an answer came directly. Even before she rose, a quiet happy feeling stole into her heart. She felt quite sure that the Lord Jesus loved her.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW RISELY LEARNT SOMETHING.

THE small table stood upon the lawn, with a white cloth over it, and bread and butter and cake neatly arranged. The two mugs of milk were there, and Nurse brought Homer a cup of hot tea from the house. That was about all he cared to take in the way of a meal, but he liked to lie and watch his two little cousins. Risely had promised to be good, and not noisy, so Nurse went into the house, and left them to enjoy themselves.

"This is what I call jolly," observed Risely.

"We had tea on the lawn a few days before Homer came," said Una, whose little face wore a very happy look.

"And before Miss Cox went," added Risely. "Ain't we having long holidays?"

"Yes, you will be a delightful little dunce one of these days," Homer remarked.

"I don't mean to be a dunce," said Risely.

"Don't you? Then you must set to work."

"I shall work some day. I like holidays now. It's easy enough to learn," said Risely. "I'm not stupid like a girl."

"Girls are not stupid. That is quite a small boy's

notion," said Homer. "I should like to set you against Una. She would beat you out and out."

Risely ate bread and butter with a dignified air. Words failed him.

"But Risely is so clever," said Una.

"If he is ever so clever, he will do nothing without hard work."

"I shan't plod if I'm clever," said Risely. "It's the dull boys that plod."

"Just so," said Homer. "There are a few dull plodding fellows in my school, who carry off all the prizes, and such a lot of clever ones down at the bottom of the classes. I expect you are so clever that you will be at the very foot of your school,—almost out at the toes, in fact."

"I shan't," said Risely with disgust. "I mean to be right up at the top."

"You haven't begun Latin yet?"

"N—o."

"Or French?"

"I know French," said Risely.

"*Bon petit garçon.*"

Risely grew red and was silent.

"What does that mean?"

Risely gave no answer.

"Come—that's tremendously easy—the first thing a fellow learns. '*Bon petit garçon.*' What is it, Una?"

"Una doesn't know," said Risely. "And I believe you are talking Latin, just to aggravate me."

"O Risely, Risely!" and Homer shook with laughter. "What does it mean, Una? Come—you can't say you don't know. I see it in your face."

"Good little boy," said Una timidly.

"It isn't," said Risely.

"*Bon petit garçon*—good little boy. Una is right," said Homer.

"She isn't."

"Get your French grammar, and show me my mistake," said Homer, with a very merry pair of brown eyes.

"I don't believe '*bon-ti-garçon*' is in my grammar," said Risely.

"O yes, it is, Risely," said Una. "It is just after the sixth exercise."

"Come, your memory isn't bad," remarked Homer.

"Well, Risely, are you going to set me right?"

"You can get the grammar, Una," said Risely.

"That's pretty," muttered Homer. "Come here, Una."

Una went, not understanding, and he took a quiet hold of her hand.

"Now, Risely, please to get the grammar yourself. I am not going to see a young lady ordered about in that fashion. Gentlemen always wait upon ladies."

"They don't," said Risely.

"They do. Ever since the days of chivalry. The gentlemen wait upon the ladies, and the ladies do lots of things in return. Eh, Una?"

"O Homer, please let me go. I always do."

"Of course you do! Run and get the grammar, Risely."

"Una is to go."

"Una is not going."

"You don't want to have the grammar brought. That's why," said Risely. "You know you are all wrong."

"What, about the good little boy? I can afford to bear that accusation. Get the grammar yourself if you want it."

Homer plainly meant what he said. Risely sat and sulked.

"Una, you don't go," said Homer.

"Please," entreated Una.

"No, I want to cure that lazy little boy. Off with you, Risely. I'm waiting to be convinced of my mistake."

To Una's great surprise Risely rose and marched away. He did not at all like having to do so, and he loitered round the borders of the lawn, and made believe to be going anywhere except to the house. Presently, however, he vanished through the front door, and a little later he returned. His face was not amiable.

"Where's the grammar?" asked Homer.

No answer.

"Come—where is it?"

"I haven't brought it."

"Why not?"

"Didn't choose," mumbled Risely.

"Couldn't you find anything about the good little boy?"

Silence again. Risely comforted himself with a large three-cornered slice of cake, but he felt injured.

"We haven't heard anything about Miss Cox for such a long while," said Una, hoping that the French question was disposed of.

"Perhaps she hasn't anything to write about. Or perhaps she is coming back directly," said Homer.

"Papa said he meant to go and see her—didn't he, Risely? But he hasn't written either. Does your Papa keep going away, Homer?"

"No. Don't you know my father is a clergyman? He can't be always leaving his parish."

"I wish my Papa was a clergyman too. I should like him to stay always at home."

Risely kept silence till tea was over; but he had not forgiven Homer. He did not like to find himself mistaken, and it made him feel very cross. Indeed, ever since the discovery of the spikes on the wall, Risely had been more or less in a naughty mood.

Tea having come to an end, the two children went away to water their gardens. Homer had a piece of business of his own in hand. He left his railway-rug, went into the dining-room, and sat down at the table to write a letter. Nurse might have protested if she had been there, but she was not. This was the letter he wrote:

"Hillside, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR ALICE,

"There is something I want done in a great hurry. You don't mind my not having written before, do you? Una is the jolliest little thing—just like you two. Risely wants the conceit taken out of him. But it is about Una I want to write. Only think! she has no Bible of her own, and she knows almost nothing about anything—I mean of *that* sort. I am trying to help her a little, and I want to give her a Bible. Please buy one, and send it. You needn't tell about this: Stephens would laugh. Not that I care about that, really, if there

was need ; but it is no business of his. Mind the Bible is a nice one—gilt clasp, and I want gilt edges, of that sort that look red in one light. You will find the money for it in the corner of the top right-hand drawer in my room, in a brown box, and the key of the box is in my desk downstairs, or in one of my other drawers. If it isn't there, I don't know where it is ; and if the purse isn't in the box—the money, I mean—it is in a purse, and the purse is somewhere in my room—at least, I think so. I know there are seven or eight shillings, and you will find them somehow, won't you ? Please get the Bible and send it off directly. I can't write any more, so with love to you all, I am

“Your affectionate brother,

“HOMER GRANVILLE.”

“It is dreadfully shaky writing,” said Homer half-aloud. “Well, it must do. I hope they won't suspect I haven't been so well.”

He addressed an envelope and stamped it, then laid his head down on the desk, and did not move for some minutes.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW HOMER DISPOSED OF RISELY.

"WHY, Homer!" said Una suddenly; and Homer sat up. "Don't you feel well?" she asked.

"I don't know; I'm awfully tired," said Homer. "What do you want?"

"Only some string for Risely. I didn't know you were coming indoors."

"I wanted to write a letter. Does that look very shaky, Una?"

Una surveyed the sheet with a respectful air.

"I think you write beautifully," she said. "It's all so straight up and down."

Homer laughed, and drew a piece of string out of his pocket.

"Will that do for you?"

"O thank you, Homer."

He went slowly out to the lawn, carrying the letter with him, and threw himself down again on the rug. Una followed, and stood looking.

"Homer, do you know you are ever so white—all over your face?"

"I feel white, rather," said Homer, shutting his eyes.

"The ground is going up and down as if I were at sea."

Una glanced round, but found the lawn steady.

"It's so funny that I can't see it too," she said.

"I'm glad you can't. It isn't so very delightful," said Homer, with a sigh. "Una, I wish you would get that put in the post. Kirby would do it, but I can't go after him."

"O Homer, Risely is calling."

"Never mind; he can wait a moment. Kirby has just gone to the back."

Una ran away with haste, note in hand. She came back to say that all was right, and then flew to answer Risely's shouts. Homer could not see the two children at their gardens, for the corner of the house came between. Sounds of indignant complaint reached him, and then for awhile things went quietly. But presently Risely's voice waxed loud.

Homer wondered what was the matter, and had half a mind to go and see. The other half of his mind persuaded him to wait. And just while he was thinking which to do, Una gave a little scream, and came running along the side-path, with Risely after her. Risely looked angry, and Una seemed frightened. She rushed straight to Homer, and he started up and put his arm round her, warding off with the other hand what Risely had meant for a blow.

"For shame, Risely! Stand off," he said indignantly. "Striking a girl! You coward."

"She won't do as she is told," said Risely.

"Won't do as you told her, you mean! Keep off."

Risely would not keep off. He made little dashes at Una, but found Homer too quick for him.

"If you don't walk off this instant, I shall have to give you a lesson that you won't forget," said Homer.

"I want Una."

"You may want her a little longer. She shall stay with me."

Risely's passion went beyond control. He managed to catch Una's wrist, and held on like a vice, till she burst into tears of pain. The grasp was not easily loosened. Homer had to use force, but the next moment Risely's own wrists were struggling helplessly in Homer's two hands.

"You're to let me go ! Homer, I say ! you're to let me go."

Hands being imprisoned, Risely remembered that his feet were free, and he began to use them. Una was favoured with the first attempt.

"That is to be the order of things, is it ?" said Homer. "Come with me."

"O Homer ! don't hurt him, please. Poor Risely !"

Una was too frightened to cry. Risely fought in vain. Homer held him fast, looking very white and very determined. Dizziness or no dizziness, he walked straight across the lawn, bearing a most unwilling burden. He entered the house, went halfway upstairs, thrust the said burden into a small lumber-closet, shut and locked the door, and put the key into his pocket.

"O Homer ! O poor Risely !" said Una.

"Come away, Una," said Homer, with sternness.

Una had no choice but to obey. Homer took her hand, led her into the garden, and went back himself to the rug. A smothered sound of shouts and batterings came from within. Una listened with a woe-begone expres-

sion to the complaints of her darling hero, thus entombed. Presently she ventured to look at Homer.

"Mayn't he come out, Homer?"

"No."

"O please, please! Homer dear!"

"No."

"Never?" asked Una, with a rush of tears.

"Not till bed-time."

"O but he will be so angry."

"He must learn to keep his anger down. This sort of thing is unbearable."

Una stood in a doleful attitude, trying to believe that Homer knew best.

"It is no kindness to let him have his own way in everything; he only grows more disagreeable with it," explained Homer.

"He didn't mean to hurt me," said Una.

"Didn't he? What do you call this?" asked Homer, touching a red and swelled little wrist. "You are the most forgiving little sister I ever saw."

"I don't mind that now; and it is so dreadfully long to his bed-time."

"Not more than an hour."

Homer shut his eyes and seemed disposed to say no more. The sound of Risely's voice had ceased, and Una presently crept away to the staircase to listen. She could hear nothing, so she took up her station on the lowest step, opposite the hall-clock, and counted the lagging minutes as they went. Nurse presently found her there, and heard a tearful tale. Una half hoped that she might make a stir on Risely's behalf; but Nurse was growing rather tired of Risely's wilful ways, and

Homer was a great favourite with her. So she only remarked :

"It won't do him no harm, and Master Homer has gone off asleep; so don't you go and wake him, and worry."

"But, Nursie; O Nursie darling! *suppose* he shouldn't wake by Risely's bed-time?" said Una.

"Well then, he'll wake soon after," said Nurse calmly.

And that was all the comfort Una received. She went into the garden again, and loitered about, with a heavy heart, often going back to watch the clock. Five minutes after five minutes passed slowly by. The long hand was travelling round from half-past six to half-past seven.

Now and then she stole over the grass to take a look at Homer. He was sound asleep—no mistake about that. If only he would wake!

Ten minutes more! Would Una have to go to bed without one more glimpse of Risely? Such an idea was too dreadful. Una wandered hopelessly away from the clock to the middle of the lawn once more; and there, to her great relief, she found a pair of open eyes looking at her.

"O Homer, you have been such a time asleep!"

"You poor little piece of misery!"

Homer pulled her playfully down on the grass, and rolled her over. Una had no choice but to laugh; yet how cruel it seemed to be merry while Risely was shut up.

"O Homer, don't, please! please don't!"

She was allowed to rise in a breathless condition to her feet. And just as she was going to plead anew for Risely, a railway cab drove quickly through the garden.

"Papa! Papa! Homer, it is Papa!" half-screamed Una.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW CHANGES WERE TO COME ABOUT.

THIS was indeed an unlooked-for event. The cab drove up to the door, and Mr. Cunningham stepped out.

"Well, my little girl, how are you? All quite well? I told you it would not be a long parting this time."

"O Papa, but I didn't think you would come quite so soon."

"No, neither did I, precisely. Getting on, Homer? You don't show much improvement in your face. I am sorry for that. Your father and sisters are worrying themselves because they have not heard from you, and they fancy you are not properly looked after."

"I ought to have written," said Homer.

"Not felt up to it, I am afraid."

"N—o," said Homer, unable to give any other answer.

"I wrote to Alice this evening."

"Telling particulars about yourself?" Homer shook his head. "That will not set their minds at rest. Where is Risely?"

"I'll call him."

"Stop, there's no need. Una can go."

Homer did not regard the words. He dashed upstairs, two steps at a time, and unlocked the lumber-room door.

"I say, Risely, you can come out. Your father is here."

Risely was seated on a broken box, awaiting release. He rose with an air of dignity, and walked out of the room. Homer laid a hand on his shoulder, but it was shaken off.

"Look here, Risely, you must hear me. I don't want to get you into a scrape with uncle, and I'll say nothing about this evening. Only, if you ever treat Una so again, it shall all come out."

"I mean to tell Papa," said Risely. "I mean to ask him what right you've got to behave so in our house."

Risely slowly went downstairs, and Homer followed, with an amused face. Mr. Cunningham was in the drawing-room, with Una seated on his knee, and Nurse standing close by.

"Hallo, Risely ! So I have come to find a little boy in disgrace."

Risely marched grandly across the room, and stood in front of his father, holding himself very straight. Mr. Cunningham looked at him with an odd expression, and Una with eyes of deep sympathy. Homer stood with his back to the mantelpiece, and his lips twitching.

"Papa, Homer hasn't got no right to behave so. He shut me up."

"Hasn't *any* right, you mean," said Mr. Cunningham. "Really, I am very much obliged to Homer for taking my troublesome little boy in hand. What did he shut you up for?"

"I was angry, and he didn't like it. Papa, he is only a visitor, and this is my house."

"Heigho ! I thought it was *my* house," said Mr. Cunningham.

"It's my home, and he hasn't got no right," repeated Risely, much too warm to talk good grammar.

"Somebody else has no right to be in a passion," said Mr. Cunningham. "I hope the locking up will not be needed again ; but, meantime, I entirely agree with Homer in objecting to angry little boys. Cupboards are quite the correct places for them. I wonder now whether Nurse can manage to give us some supper, and whether there are any good-tempered children who can sit up with me. I don't want cross ones."

"Papa, *I* am good-tempered," said Risely.

"Quite sure?"

"Yes ; it's Homer that is cross."

Mr. Cunningham glanced at Homer's bright face, laughed, and said "that wouldn't do."

"So I think we may hope that nobody is cross," he said. "Now I am going to wash my hands, and I advise other folks to do the same. I have some news to tell when supper is ready."

The children's expectations were thereby greatly raised. Una managed to bestow a kiss on the back of Risely's jacket, and felt happier after, since he did not jerk her away.

By-and-by they were all gathered round the dining-room table, well supplied, though at such short notice. Cold meat and tart, eggs and cake, were happily plentiful. Risely looked quite cheerful again, and Una could not help thinking that he was none the worse for his punishment. He even seemed a little subdued by it.

The candles were lighted, and Mr. Cunningham sat

at one end of the table, with a child on each side of him, and Homer sat beyond Una, and Nurse was in and out a great deal.

"We mustn't make you small creatures ill by over-feeding late at night," said Mr. Cunningham. "Eh, Nurse? What may they have? Some of your plum-cake? I had better not offer them meat."

"No, sir, not meat. The cake won't hurt them," said Nurse. "Not if they haven't too much."

"Nothing hurts *me*," said Risely.

"Except holidays," remarked Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, I mean eating-things. I can eat everything. Men always can."

"That isn't exactly my experience," said Mr. Cunningham, taking another slice of meat. "Plum-cake at night gives me a pain in my chest. I hope that isn't unmanly."

"But then—" and Risely hesitated. "But then you are growing so very old, Papa."

"So very old, am I? Decrepit, eh? Really, I didn't know that before," said Mr. Cunningham, smoothing down his long black beard.

"I don't know what *depreckit* is," said Risely.

"Getting past work."

"O then, I wish you were, Papa, because you could stay always at home, and play with me. O do, please, be depreckit directly," said Risely, with eagerness.

Mr. Cunningham laughed till tears stood in his eyes.

"But that would be work, Risely. Playing is very hard work indeed sometimes."

"Ah, but running about isn't, and that's all I mean," said Risely.

"Running about makes my legs ache, so I'm afraid that won't suit decrepit old gentlemen. Homer, I see you are not a man. Men can eat everything, and you are eating nothing."

"Risely will undertake that for me."

"Appetite not come back yet?"

"I'm hungry—sometimes."

"You haven't been attempting any study, I hope? Your father says the doctor has strictly forbidden it for the present."

"I can't," said Homer. "If I read for half-an-hour, the letters take to dancing."

"Well, you have to follow the *laissez aller* system for a few weeks. That is all. Risely wouldn't mind leaving his lessons."

"Homer doesn't," said Risely. "He's as lazy as can be, always lying about somewhere."

"Some little boys are as impertinent as can be, always passing judgment on their betters," said Mr. Cunningham.

"It is Risely's custom," said Homer, with a gravity not forced, but real. He leant his head despondingly on his hand, as if some sort of cloud had crept over him.

"The opinion of eight years old isn't worth a rap," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, I am nine," said the injured Risely.

"Oh, I am not thinking of that! I want to get to work again."

"You won't be able yet. My dear boy, what can you expect after such an illness?"

"I'm not ill now. If I were, it would be different;

but it's only just to be a little stronger, and I could do anything."

"You will be able to do anything in reason by-and-by, if you are prudent now."

"It seems such wasted time," said Homer.

"Fields don't waste time when they lie fallow," said Mr. Cunningham. "I wonder when we shall see Risely looking white and melancholy over the notion of holidays. Come—who wishes to hear my news?"

Three voices made answer.

"I saw Miss Cox a little while ago."

"O Papa, when is she coming back?" asked Una. "And how is her sister?"

"Her sister is better, but very delicate. Miss Cox does not like to be far from her."

"I don't want her back *just* yet," said Risely.

"You won't have her just yet."

Risely clapped his hands, and said, "Hurrah!"

"In fact, there are going to be changes," said Mr. Cunningham. "When I came to talk over things, I found that Miss Cox and I had some thoughts alike. I am afraid she isn't quite up in health and spirits to the charge of such a noisy little boy as Master Risely Cunningham; and Miss Cox feels the same. What should you both say if Miss Cox didn't come back at all?"

Somehow Mr. Cunningham fancied that the children were not at all fond of Miss Cox, and would not care. He was a little mistaken. Risely, who had been clapping his hands for some seconds, stopped short with a dismayed look. Una's face grew crimson, and tears rose quickly to her eyes.

"Not come back? Where *can* she be going?" asked Risely.

"A very kind old friend in London wants Miss Cox to live with her, and teach her one little girl. And Miss Cox is fond of London, and fond of this friend, and fond of the little girl, and not at all fond of boys or country-life. So, don't you think it would be cruel to ask her to come back here? Besides, she would be living quite near her sister, and that would be a great comfort to her."

"Will somebody else come instead of Miss Cox?" asked Risely. "I shan't like that. I like Miss Cox best. She gave us such heaps of holidays."

Instead of answering, Mr. Cunningham lifted Una on his knees, and gave her a kiss.

"Come, we must not have tears," he said. "I thought my little girl would not mind particularly."

But Una hid her face in his shoulder, and sobbed quietly. She felt as if she loved Miss Cox very much indeed, and could not bear the thought of not seeing her again.

"I wonder how I am to comfort you," said Mr. Cunningham. "Una, wouldn't you like to have a charming kind delightful lady, instead of Miss Cox? Somebody who isn't poorly, and who likes long rambles and games of play, and who doesn't object to noisy little boys, and who will teach all sorts of nice things to you both?"

Una was not sure. She had a dread of strangers.

"Uncle Granville told me of her, so I think she *must* be delightful," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, did you see the new lady yourself?" asked Una.

"Yes; I saw her. I liked her very much indeed."

"Does Homer know her?" said Una, lifting a tearful face.

"No, but Homer's father does. Don't you think he is sure to make a good choice?"

Una put her face down again, and had nothing to say.

"I know I shan't like her," observed Risely. "We shan't have one single holiday ever."

"Some little boys don't seem to have one single bit of sense ever," said Mr. Cunningham. "Now you must both say good-night and go to bed. It is quite shocking to be up so late. And Homer looks fit for nothing but to do the same."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW UNA HAD A PRESENT.

MR. CUNNINGHAM actually meant to stay a whole week at home—"he *ackshally* did," as Risely declared with great glee to Una next morning. Very little more was said about the new lady who should fill Miss Cox' place in the house. Risely tried to obtain particulars, and Mr. Cunningham said he was afraid the black hen had been giving him lessons again. Risely was afraid after that to ask questions. So they only knew that the lady would come soon, but "not quite just yet," as Risely expressed it, and that everybody was sure to like her.

The day after Mr. Cunningham's arrival was a very merry one. Nobody could stay out of the merriment. Mr. Cunningham swung the children, and chased them about the garden, and joked Risely, and petted Una, and looked well after Homer. There was no leisure at all for such things as grave looks or ill tempers.

Next day Mr. Cunningham had letters to write and books to read, but still he held himself very much at everybody's beck and call. The afternoon was cool and breezy, so he had out the dog-cart, and took them all for a long drive, including Homer. They did not get home again for nearly three hours, and Homer went into wilder

spirits than even Risely, and kept them all in fits of merriment. The white horse became quite excited by such an amount of fun, and between him and the children Mr. Cunningham had enough to do. Una's sides fairly ached with laughing, and Homer was as tired as possible when it was over, and had to lie down all the evening. But the fresh air really did him good, and he looked better next day.

That was Friday, and Mr. Cunningham had some business visits to pay. Risely begged to be allowed to go with him, and promised to be "dreadfully good," if only he might. Mr. Cunningham pretended to be quite frightened at the idea of a "dreadful" little boy, but at last yielded. So Risely went off on the front-seat of the dog-cart beside his father, flourishing the whip, and looking extremely happy, while a boy sat behind to hold the horse when necessary.

Una stood gazing rather dismally after the disappearing dog-cart. She did not much like being left behind. Then Homer came up, and took her two hands, and twirled her gently round.

"You are not going to be in the dolefuls, Una?"

"No," said Una; "only I don't know what to do."

"Come and take care of me."

"Well," said Una, with a sigh. "But what shall we do?"

"I'll swing you, if you like."

"I don't care for swinging, if Risely is away," said Una; "and it tires you too."

"Suppose we sit down in a snug corner, anywhere you like, and I'll show you something,"

"Show me what?" asked Una.

"Something I have for you."

"For *me*?" said Una.

"Yes, you yourself."

"O Homer!"

"Well, where shall we go?"

Una considered with a serious air.

"Cowslip Meadow," suggested Homer.

"O no! you mustn't."

"I could do it to-day. The orchard, then?"

"I should like that."

Una was perfectly happy again. She danced along by his side, wondering what she was to see. They went to the middle of the orchard, and sat on the long grass under a very aged and crabbed-looking apple-tree, the branches of which grew chiefly on one side.

"It is pretty here," said Homer. "I like a thoroughly wild place like this orchard—no care taken of it."

"I like the garden better," said Una, wondering when the "something" would be produced.

"Do you? I don't, altogether. This feels like freedom. I don't believe the grass has been cut for years. Those spikes on the wall look vicious, Una. Risely will never be able to get over there again."

"He wants to try," said Una.

"He had better not. However, I fancy he has more sense than that. I can't imagine why the wall was ever carried on across the ditch. No use in it that I can see. Look here, Una."

Homer brought out a little parcel from under his jacket, and put it into Una's hands. Una coloured up with a bright pink of pleasure. She was greatly puzzled

as to what could be within. The string being untied, she slowly removed the paper.

A Bible lay before her eyes—just such a Bible as Homer had wished for. It was bound in dark creamy brown, with gilt clasp, and the edges gilt and red in different lights. The print was clear, and not too small.

“Homer, this isn’t for me.”

“Would you like to have it?”

“Oh!”

Una had no other words. Her fingers shook with pleasure as she turned delicately over leaf after leaf. She could hardly believe her own eyes. On the blank page at the beginning was written :

“UNA CUNNINGHAM,

“From H. Granville.”

“O Homer!” said Una, with crimsoned cheeks,—“I do love you so.”

“This isn’t to be locked up, you know,” said Homer.
“It is to be used always.”

Una put up her face for a kiss, and then hugged the Bible gently but with ecstasy in both arms.

“It’s a beauty,” she said. “It is such a beauty. I do love it so. O I do love it ever so much.”

“You’ll read it,” said Homer.

“O yes.”

She turned it over and over, round and round, examining every inch.

“I do love it,” she said again and again.

“Why?” asked Homer.

“Why, you gave it me,” said Una. “That is partly why. And it is my very own. And it is beautiful. And it is God’s book.”

"Father would tell you to put your last reason first," said Homer, pulling three blades of grass, and platting them together; while a little bird perched on a bough overhead, and burst into a prolonged twitter.

Una looked up, and smiled at the bird's bright eyes. Then she dropped her head a little, and sat thinking.

"Homer, it is all about JESUS in here," she said reverently.

"Yes," said Homer.

"I don't think I know Him yet," said Una.

"Why not?"

"I don't think I do."

Homer did not speak directly. Una glanced up in his face, and then glanced down. The little bird hopped to a higher branch and twittered afresh, and another little bird flew close over Una's head. But Una did not notice either. She wanted Homer to speak.

"At all events——"

"Yes," said Una, for Homer stopped.

"He knows *you*!"

"How?" asked Una.

"Every way. Outside and inside and altogether. *I* don't know you like that."

"Don't you?"

"Of course not. You do things sometimes that I don't expect. But God knows you, out and out; and He knows what you want, too. If you want to belong to Him——"

"I *do* want," said Una, with tears in her eyes.

"Well, He knows it. And you must tell Him."

"Must I,—if He knows?"

"That doesn't make any difference. He likes to be told everything, just as if He didn't know."

Una's head went down so low, that Homer could only see the crown of her hat.

"I *did*, one day," she whispered. "But I haven't thought about Him since—much."

"If you forget Him for days together, you can't be learning to know Him better."

"Can't I?"

"Of course not. How can you? You promised to be my little friend, when I first came, and then you hardly came near me for three whole days. We didn't get on a bit in our friendship, though I wanted it, and perhaps you did too. We didn't get on till we began to sit together and talk."

"But—I can't do *that*," said Una.

"I don't see why not."

"But I mean—I mean—I couldn't with Him," said Una softly.

"I don't see why. I'll tell you what, Una,—father says it ought to be like Mary with all of us."

"What ought?"

"Why, I mean we ought to live like that. She sat at His feet—the feet of Jesus—and heard what He had to say. And she could ask Him anything she wanted to know."

"But we can't sit there."

"I think we can; only very often we're too busy, and won't. And, Una, prayer is like that."

"Like what?"

"Sitting at His feet, and asking and telling Him everything."

"But He talked to *her*."

"Well, and if you listen He will talk to you. People won't listen. Every time you read your Bible He will talk to you, if only you listen."

Una looked down reverently at the brown volume, with its shining clasp.

"Father says we never ought to read without a little prayer asking for the Holy Spirit to teach us. And then we are to *expect* to be spoken to."

"To be spoken to?"

"Yes. The Lord Jesus speaks, you know, by His Holy Spirit whispering down in our hearts."

"I don't think I know where the Holy Spirit is," said Una.

"He is here—everywhere. He is God," said Homer.

"And the Lord Jesus is God," said Una.

"Yes. Don't you remember how often it comes in the service on Sunday—'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'—*one God*, Una?"

"Yes, I remember," said Una. "But I don't think I understand. Is the Holy Spirit really *here*, Homer?"

"Yes," said Homer. "And He teaches all that come to the Lord Jesus."

"And Jesus is here too?" said Una.

"Yes; He promised to be 'with us always.' He has gone away into heaven, and we can't *see* Him till He comes back as a King. Some day He will. But He is here, too, all the while; because He is God, and God is everywhere."

"Ought I to understand it all?" asked Una.

"No," said Homer. "You can't understand all about the government of England; but that needn't keep you from *being* governed, and from believing what a kind good Queen we have over us."

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW SOMETHING COULD NOT BE TALKED ABOUT.

"I'm glad there are *some* things quite easy, for a little girl like me," said Una, softly smiling. "It isn't a bit difficult about God loving me, and the Lord Jesus being so kind."

"No," said Homer.

"I think He must be kinder than everybody," said Una. "My Papa is kind, and so are you. But I think He is as kind as my Mamma would have been to me."

"More," muttered Homer.

"I almost forget my Mamma. But she used to kiss me, I know, and hold me tight in her arms."

Homer turned away his head.

"And there's a picture of the Lord Jesus holding little children in His arms," continued Una in a happy voice. "O I do like to think of that. It is so nice. Because, you know, I haven't got *any* Mamma." And Una gave a deep sigh.

Homer could not stand that. He started up and went to the other side of the tree, and began pulling at a branch as if he meant to break it off. Una watched him anxiously for some seconds, and then remarked :

"Papa doesn't *quite* like the branches being broken."

"That one is half dead," said Homer huskily.

He snapped off a twig, and flung it away. Then he came back, caught up Una, put her on a low branch, and began swinging her to and fro. Una liked that, but she did not like the look in Homer's face. She could not make it out at first. Were those really tears in his eyes?

"Please, Homer, did I say anything naughty?" she asked.

"No, of course not," said Homer, a flush coming up in his cheeks.

But he seemed to forget that he was swinging her, and stopped. Una sat on the bough, with her little black shoes and white stockings hanging down below her short pink frock, and her hat falling off from her brown hair. Homer was gazing hard into the distance at something or nothing, and his lips were pressed together tightly with a quivering movement of the lines round them. Una studied him earnestly, and a pitying look came into her face.

"I think I know," she said. "Poor Homer! I love you so, Homer. Weren't you thinking that you haven't any Mamma either? She has gone away to heaven, hasn't she, where my Mamma is? I wonder if they like being together there very much. And you are too big to be one of Jesus' little lambs, and so He can't carry you like He can me; and so you want her back, don't you? Poor Homer!"

Homer tried to smile, but it would not do. He lifted Una to the ground, and walked away.

Una ran after him, doubting what to do. Had she been unkind or naughty to speak so? Was Homer displeased?

Not a word was said till the orchard lay behind them. Homer walked straight on ; now and then picking a leaf and throwing it away. He had almost forgotten the little feet running to keep pace with him, till a little voice said :

" Please, Homer, do kiss me."

Homer granted that request at once. He went then to one of the rough garden benches, sat down, and took her on his knee.

" I didn't mean to be naughty," said Una. " I won't speak of our Mammās again, if I mustn't."

" I don't mind," said Homer ; " only——"

Homer came to a stop. Una looked up in his face, then laid her head comfortingly on his shoulder, and put up her hand to stroke his cheek.

" I am so sorry, Homer. I do love you so. I am so sorry, poor Homer. I do wish she hadn't died."

" Una, you must *not* say any more," said Homer, with a choke in his voice.

Una felt her hand caught in one of his and squeezed tightly. He held her back with the other, so that she tried in vain to get another glimpse of his face.

" Mustn't I ?" she said.

" Not about that."

Una was silent. The boy had a hard fight for self-control.

" Homer dear, please, you hurt my hand," she said gently.

" O I didn't know I had it."

He released her, and let her sit upon his knee.

" I didn't mean to be naughty," said Una.

" You were not."

"I didn't mean to make you sorry. I won't ever speak to you about my Mamma again."

"Yes, you may, if you like."

"May I?" said Una wonderingly.

"Yes, if you like. About *her*; only not——"

"Only not about your Mamma," said Una softly.

Homer shook his head.

"I won't," said Una.

Then they did not speak for two or three minutes. After that, Homer began telling stories to make Una laugh, and they had no more grave talk at all. By-and-by the dog-cart came home again, and they were a merry party all together, and Homer was as merry as anybody. But Una could not forget what had passed. It seemed so sad that Homer should have lost his mother, and that he could not bear even to hear her spoken about.

Mr. Cunningham did not often stay at home so long as this time. He told the children that he meant to remain two days beyond the whole week, and that then he was going away, and Homer with him.

"But when would the 'New Lady' come?"

Risely asked that question one afternoon, and Mr. Cunningham smiled and said, "Don't be afraid; all in good time." And Risely could learn no more.

"I'm not afraid of *course*," he said afterwards to Una. "But I want to know; anybody would want to know. And I'm quite sure I shan't like her."

"Why, Risely, Papa says she is as nice as can be."

"Yes, Papa says so. But I don't believe she will be nice to me. I expect she's old."

"Why?" asked Una.

"I expect she's nearly sixty," said Risely. "And that's dreadfully old,—as old as can be."

"O no," said Una, "it isn't as old as can be, because old Hewitt is seventy, and seventy is older than sixty."

"Well, it's old," said Risely. "Papa isn't sixty yet, and *he* is old. He says it makes his legs ache to run, and I don't believe the New Lady will be able to run at all. I like people who can run."

"But why do you think she is sixty?" asked Una.

"I heard Papa talking to Homer, and it was about her. Homer was going to say something, and Papa looked at me, and put up his finger, and Homer stopped and began to laugh. Homer said something, though. He said, 'Not very old, I suppose?' And Papa said, 'Not quite sixty.' And I'm not quite ten, Una, and that means that I'm nine, and you're not quite eleven, and that means that you are ten."

"Then the lady must be fifty-nine," said Una. "But I am not nearly eleven, because I am only two months over ten, and you are three months over nine. Do you think the lady will mind our knowing her age?"

"I don't see why," said Risely. "And I know she is old too, Una, because I asked Papa what she was like; and he asked if I didn't think grey curls very pretty for ladies?"

"But perhaps he was laughing at you."

"O no, he wasn't. He didn't laugh one bit. And Homer said, 'We shan't have so much running wild now.' And Papa said, 'No, she's a first-rate Dizzy—Pliny—something.' I don't know exactly what he meant."

"Homer gets dizzy," said Una.

"And Pliny was a man—at least there was a Pliny, and another Pliny," said Risely. "Homer told me all about it, so I know. And they were both very clever, and did lots of things. And then Papa said, 'No chance of dunces any longer. She has all the Lodges at her fingers' ends.'"

"But, Risely dear, what are 'the Lodges?'"

"I don't know. I expect it means—means—something," said Risely, bringing out the last word after a pause.

"And shall we have lodges at our fingers' ends, too?" asked Una rather dolefully, looking at her hand, and fancying a row of thimbles.

"I don't know. Of course we shall," said Risely. "I don't mind about that, only of course I shan't like to have no holidays."

"But perhaps we shall have one sometimes."

"I don't believe we shall. That was what Papa and Homer meant, when they said we shouldn't be dunces, and shouldn't run wild."

"I shouldn't like *no* holidays," said Una uneasily.

"No, and it isn't good for people," said Risely. "It makes them ill. That was how Homer got so ill. He wouldn't have holidays, and he worked hard, and his brain had a fever. Papa told me, so I know. I expect Homer isn't clever, or he wouldn't have to work so hard. Clever boys don't need. But if the New Lady is going to make us work dreadfully hard, and have no holidays, Papa will be very sorry too, when our brains get fevers."

"I hope they won't," said Una soberly. "I shouldn't mind seeing the lawn and things dance about a little, but

it wouldn't be nice to have it always. And I shouldn't like not to be able to run in the sun, without getting a pain in my head."

"Then you had better ask Papa to give us plenty of holidays," said Risely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW RISELY LIKED TO GIVE HIS OPINION.

"I AM going somewhere to-day," said Mr. Cunningham, next Wednesday morning.

"O Papa, you mustn't leave us to-day, please," entreated Una, "because it is your very last, and you are going away to-morrow, and so is Homer, and I don't know what we shall do."

"I think I know," said Homer. "You will write me a letter."

"I can't write nicely," said Una. "But would you like a letter, Homer?"

"Of course I should, immensely," said Homer. "Perhaps the New Lady will help you with it."

"I wonder when the New Lady will come?" said Una, sighing.

"You will be very glad when she does, won't you?"

"I don't know," said Una. "I'll try."

"Papa, I know lots about her," said Risely. "I heard you and Homer talking. And I know how old she is, and about her having grey curls, and ever so much."

"Yes, little pitchers are always said to have long ears," remarked Mr. Cunningham.

"I haven't long ears at all," said Risely, jumping up

to look at himself in the glass over the mantelpiece. "My ears are not long, Papa. They are quite short and round. Kirby's stick out ever so much more than mine do. Homer needn't laugh. I heard *him* talking about the New Lady."

"What did you hear me saying?" asked Homer.

"I heard you," repeated Risely; "and I know what you meant too—at least some. Papa, where are you going to-day? May we come too?"

"Yes, if you like. I am going in the dog-cart."

"Where, Papa?"

"For a drive."

"Is that all?" asked Risely. "Why, we have a drive every day—at least, except some days."

"Every day, except when we don't," said Homer.

"Mind you are all ready by ten minutes to three," said Mr. Cunningham.

And at three o'clock nobody was behindhand. The dog-cart came round from the stable, drawn by the white horse in frisky spirits, and Risely stood on the door-step, just as frisky.

"Una is going to sit up in front with me," said Mr. Cunningham.

"O but, Papa, I want to be there and have the whip," cried Risely. "I like smacking it."

"The whip has to be content with my handling to-day," said Mr. Cunningham. "You must get up behind with Homer. Now my little girl! That is right. Jump, Risely."

Risely had to submit, and, after all, he could not look unhappy. It was such a lovely day. The sun was not too hot, and as they went briskly through the garden a

fresh breeze met them, and tossed Una's curls against Homer's shoulders, till he caught and threatened to tie them up in a bunch. Homer was looking better than a week before. Mr. Cunningham had made him take good care of himself.

Nobody asked where they were going. Mr. Cunningham went down one lane and up another, just where the children dictated. Now and then they passed a field where all the hay was not taken in, and whiffs of sweet scent came on the air. The hedges were sprinkled with pink-edged roses, and the distant hills looked soft and blue, over the many-tinted country lying between. But somehow, though Mr. Cunningham did not seem to be choosing any particular direction, it happened that at half-past four the dog-cart drew up outside the Cowbridge railway station.

"Why, Papa ; are we going to get out here ?" shouted Risely, as his father stepped down.

"If you have no objection," said Mr. Cunningham, lifting Una to the ground.

The two boys speedily followed. Homer was laughing quietly.

"Papa, what have we come here for ?"

"Business, Risely."

That sounded very serious. Risely opened his eyes wide.

"Business, Papa ! But this is not a shop. It's the station."

"There is other business in the world besides shopping," said Mr. Cunningham. "Come along."

And Mr. Cunningham walked through a door, where one or two men in blue coats were lounging about. Risely stared hard in all directions. He wondered

whether this event had anything to do with the "New Lady," and Una wondered the same.

Inside the building was a small pile of luggage, and a lady and a little girl sat near. But Mr. Cunningham took no notice of them. A kind of wooden wall had a square hole in it, and a man's head showed through the hole. Risely whispered to Una :

"*That's* where they get the tickets."

"Who do?" asked Una.

"Everybody. Look, a man is going now."

But Mr. Cunningham passed straight on to the platform beyond, and the children had to follow. It was a quiet little station, and the platform had few people on it. No train was standing there. Risely went close to the edge, and peered over.

"Risely, come away," said his father.

"I shan't tumble, Papa."

Mr. Cunningham took Risely's hand, and drew him back.

"Very well," he said. "If you do not choose to obey, I must hold your hand all the while."

"O no ! O please !" said Risely, in great alarm at the idea of anything so undignified. "I won't go near again. But I shouldn't fall."

"I must be the judge as to that. I will have no risk."

And then Mr. Cunningham let him go free, and took a look at the station clock, remarking,—

"Five minutes to wait, before the train is due."

"Papa, did you bring us here to look at the train?" asked Risely.

"Perhaps it was for the train to look at you," suggested Homer.

"I wonder why they make the platform so high," said Risely. "*I* wouldn't. I would make it quite low down on the ground. That would be much nicer."

"Very much," said Homer. "Only we should each want a little ladder, so as to climb up into the carriages."

"I can climb," said Risely. "I could climb anywhere. I shouldn't mind."

"But how about the ladies?"

"O well, but I wouldn't make it *so* high," said Risely. "What are those wooden things for between the irons?"

"Between the rails?" asked Homer. "The sleepers, you mean."

"No, I don't. I mean those wooden things."

"Those are sleepers."

"They aren't."

"If you know so much better than I do, what do you ask me for?"

"You are just laughing at me," said Risely. "I know you are when you look like that."

And indeed Homer's brown eyes were sparkling with merriment, and the corners of his mouth were twitching.

"What are they *really*?" asked Una.

"The sleepers. That is the name, Una."

"Well, but what are they for?" asked Risely. "And what are those great engine-carts, sticking right in the way over there?"

"Trucks," said Homer. "Those are trucks, and they are *out* of the way. That is a siding."

"A what?"

"A siding. A side-line, where they are safe not to be run into, because trains don't pass to and fro there. If they were on this line we might have an accident."

"Look ! there's a sort of a wooden arm sticking out," shouted Risely, to the no small amusement of a blue-coated official behind. "It jerked itself out suddenly up on that high post. Oh !"

"That shows a train coming," said Homer. "You will see it directly."

"That is not our train," said Mr. Cunningham, approaching—for he had walked to the other end of the platform. "It is the express on the other line. But ours is due."

"Ours, Papa?" said Risely. "Are we going away in it?"

"No," said Mr. Cunningham. "A friend of ours is going to get out."

"O Papa, is it the gentleman with the red beard?"

"Well, no ; not exactly," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, is it an old lady?" asked Risely, thinking he had hit upon a clever way of finding out what he wanted to know.

"Ah, you are thinking of the grey curls," said Mr. Cunningham. "No, it is not your old lady with the grey curls. Look sharp, children ; here comes the express."

"Papa, who makes the railways and engines?" asked Risely. "O *doesn't* that go fast!"

"Engineers have a good deal to do with the matter," said Mr. Cunningham.

He drew Risely a little farther back, and Homer took Una's hand ; for the express train was quite near, and plainly did not mean to stop at Cowbridge. It rushed on like a whirlwind, and dashed past with the noise of thunder, making the platform tremble beneath

the children's feet, and carrying a strong draught of air after it. Risely's exclamations were drowned, and Una was frightened, and clung to Homer.

"That is a noisy monster, isn't he?" said Homer, when it was possible to speak.

"O Homer, I didn't like it at all," said Una.

"You wouldn't mind if you were in the train."

"O but I should. I hope I shan't ever be in that train."

"Plenty of other trains go just as fast," said Homer.

"I should like to be in it," said Risely. "I should like to be on the engine, like those men. O here comes another train."

The second train came on the nearer line from the opposite direction, and it stopped at the platform, instead of rushing past. The guard walked up and down, calling "Cowbridge! Cowbridge!" and a few people stepped out.

Mr. Cunningham moved away, and Homer stayed with the two children. Then Mr. Cunningham came back with a lady.

But this lady was very far from fifty-nine years old, and she had no grey curls. Una and Risely were half relieved and half disappointed. They wanted to see the New Lady, and yet they did not want her to arrive.

This lady was about the same height as Miss Cox, neither tall nor short, but perhaps a little more plump. She had a grey travelling suit, and a cloak on her arm, and a bag in her hand. Her face looked nearly as young as Miss Cox's, only it had bands of dark-brown hair brushed smoothly back from a wide, smooth forehead; and her eyes, too, were dark-brown, and very

quick and bright ; and her mouth, which was a particularly pretty one, seemed more given to smiling than looking grave.

The children saw all this quickly. For the lady smiled when she shook hands with Homer, and when she shook hands with Risely, and when she kissed Una. And she smiled also when Homer politely took her bag and cloak from her. Una thought, from her face, that she liked Homer ; and Una liked the lady for that. Then Mr. Cunningham came up again to say that her luggage was all right, and the lady smiled afresh.

But who could she be ? That was the question.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW A DRIVE WAS FOLLOWED BY A RACE.

"Now we are all right, I believe," said Mr. Cunningham, as the whistle sounded, and the train moved slowly away.

"One box and one portmanteau."

"That is all," said the lady.

"Then we had better get home as fast as possible. You must be tired, and want your tea."

Mr. Cunningham marched quickly ahead, with a porter who carried the box on his shoulder and the portmanteau in one hand. The box was a very heavy one, and Risely gazed with great admiration at this feat of strength. He wondered when he would be able to do the same, and decided to begin practising with some boxes in the lumber-room at home.

The lady had taken Una's hand, and was following with Homer by her side. Risely ran to his father, and softly pulled one of Mr. Cunningham's coat-tails to gain attention.

"Papa, who is that lady?"

"The friend I was expecting," said Mr. Cunningham, looking down at Risely.

"She isn't the New Lady," said Risely, "because that lady is nearly sixty, and this lady isn't."

"I shouldn't think so," said Mr. Cunningham. "She looks a long way off from that age."

"And she has no grey curls," said Risely. "Nor no curls at all."

"I hope the New Lady will be able to teach you grammar," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Why, Papa, wasn't that grammar?"

"Of a sort; not the right sort."

"I only said she hadn't got any curls, Papa. Is this lady coming to our house?"

"Yes."

"Is she going to stay?"

"She may stay as long as she likes."

"A *long* visit, Papa—ever so long."

"Not improbably."

"Papa, you won't tell me anything!" said Risely, lowering his voice to a whisper, as the other three drew near. "Is she going to take care of me and Una till the New Lady comes?"

"I have no doubt she will look after you."

"Papa, what is her name?"

"Miss Erskine."

"What a queer name! It doesn't mean anything that I can see. Is the big box going with us? Why it *can't*, Papa."

"No, that must be sent. We will manage with the portmanteau."

It was not quite easy to manage. But the lady was helped up in front, and Una was squeezed in between her and Mr. Cunningham, and the portmanteau was disposed of behind. Mr. Cunningham and Homer had not much room for their legs, but that mattered little.

"I thought you would not mind a crowding," said Mr. Cunningham. "It would have been a pity to leave any one behind."

"O no, this is much pleasanter," said the lady. "I do so enjoy it."

They had as merry a drive returning as going. Homer was full of fun, and Miss Erskine sat smiling at his stories and the children's laughter. Risely grew excited, and had to be kept in order. Una was much more subdued. She could not help laughing at Homer, but also she could not help remembering that on the morrow both her Papa and Homer were to go away. And Risely had whispered to her, "It's not the New Lady, but it's somebody who is to take care of us till the New Lady comes." Una did not like that at all. One new lady was bad enough, but two new ladies were worse.

At the same time Una liked this one. She could not help liking that kind face. There was so little room that Una had to sit very close to Miss Erskine, and Miss Erskine, instead of minding it, put her arm round Una in quite an affectionate way, and talked to her very pleasantly. Before the drive came to an end, Una could not help wishing that this *were* the New Lady after all.

Well, certainly neither Una nor Risely showed any sharpness at guessing that day, or they might have found out the truth sooner. But when people have once got a wrong notion into their heads, it is not always easily disturbed. And being assured that this was a mere visitor, Una and Risely doubted no more about the matter.

When Hillside was reached, Miss Erskine seemed quite delighted. She said the garden looked lovely. She

put back her veil, and drew in a long breath, and said,—

“O this *is* a sweet place!”

Then they stopped at the front-door, and all descended. Nurse came to meet them, and Miss Erskine shook hands with her.

“I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Wyatt,” she said. “Mr. Cunningham has told me a great deal about you, and all your care of these dear children.”

Nurse looked as pleased as possible. Miss Erskine glanced round her smilingly, and went back to the door.

“It is so peaceful,” she said, “so far out of all clamour. A country-life has been my dream of happiness.”

“Isn’t your home in the country?” asked Una timidly. It was a wonderful thing that Una should venture to speak to a grown-up stranger of her own accord. But somehow she could not go on feeling shy with Miss Erskine.

“No, dear, I have always lived in a town. This is lovely.”

“It is prettier than where I live,” said Homer. “I wish I were not going to-morrow.”

Homer gave a sigh as he spoke. Then he felt Una touch his hand, and he glanced down to see a pair of eyes brimming over with tears.

That would not do at all. Homer was determined to have no crying scene. He caught Una’s hand, and went off for a race round the garden with her. Una had no choice about going; and as Risely set off at full gallop after them, it became a trial of speed. Una could not have beaten Risely alone, but with Homer’s hand it was a different matter.

Mr. Cunningham called them back at first, but he was not heard through Risely's shouts of excitement, so he and Miss Erskine stood on the door-step and laughed. Homer was a first-rate runner, but he hung back a little for Una's sake, while Una's slender little legs twinkled over the ground in the prettiest fashion, and her brown curls flew wildly about behind her.

Risely made frantic efforts to overtake them. It was all in vain. Una's powers began to fail, so Homer just caught her up off the ground, finished the tour of the garden, and came back to the door still ahead. Una was rosy, laughing, and untidy, and had forgotten all about tears. Risely was breathlessly trying to explain how easily he could have beaten the other two, if *only* he had run a little faster. Homer put Una down, laughing still, but leaning against the porch, and turning white.

"You foolish boy, you have done for yourself now," said Mr. Cunningham, laying a hand on his arm. "What made you try that wild freak?"

Homer gave no explanation. He went slowly into the house, and Una had to run upstairs to get ready for tea. She wondered whether Miss Erskine would pour it out, but when she came down Mr. Cunningham said: "Miss Erskine is tired with her journey, and wants to see how nicely you can pour out the tea."

Una felt rather alarmed, but she said nothing. The table was spread, and the tea already made. Miss Erskine soon appeared, and then Risely. A minute later, when they had taken their seats, Homer came in, looking dreadfully tired, and with eyes that told of headache.

"Give him a cup of hot tea, Una," said Mr. Cunningham. "This is a specimen of your prudence, eh, Homer?"

"Una wanted enlivening," said Homer.

"O Homer! I didn't. I'm so sorry."

"Could you not have enlivened her at less exertion to yourself?"

"I don't know."

"Well, the kindest thing is to leave you alone for a while. How old should you take Una to be, Miss Erskine?"

"Ten, is she not? But I don't think she looks so much."

"She looks eight," said Homer.

"Or nine. Risely is tall."

"Papa," said Risely, "I want to be an engineer."

"We will consider the matter," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Last time I was at home you wanted to be a cabin-boy——"

"No, Papa; a sailor!"—rather indignantly.

"O a sailor, was it? And the time before that, a soldier."

"And last week, a doctor," said Homer.

"I don't want to be a doctor now; I don't like doctors. Papa, I do want to be an engineer."

"How long shall you want it, my dear boy?"

"Always; I shan't change," said Risely. "I'm perfectly sure I shan't, Papa. I would rather be an engineer than anything."

"Plenty of time before you in which to decide," said Mr. Cunningham.

"I have a brother who is a civil engineer," said Miss Erskine, "and a cousin who is a royal engineer. Which do you mean to be, Risely?"

"What's a *civil* engineer?" asked Risely. "Aren't they always civil? Do they both sit upon the engine?"

The peal of laughter that followed was a real trial to Risely's dignity ; he swelled beneath it. But Miss Erskine was taken by surprise, and could not restrain herself, and Homer went into fits.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Risely, with extreme gravity. "I saw the engineers on the engine to-day, and there were two of them, like what Miss Erskine says ; but I don't care a bit which I am, only I don't mean to have my face so smudgy."

"O Risely, don't !" and Homer shook from head to foot, while Mr. Cunningham fairly covered his face with his handkerchief.

"I don't care what you all say," returned Risely hardily. "I mean to be an engineer, and I don't see why I shouldn't. And I think it is very unkind of you all to laugh at me about nothing."

CHAPTER XX.

HOW AN EVENING WENT BEFORE A PARTING.

"It really is too bad," said Miss Erskine. "But we don't call those two men engineers, Risely."

"They're on the engine," said Risely, as if that settled the point.

"Yes; but they are called the driver and the stoker."

"Then what are engineers?" asked Risely.

"Gentlemen who have studied the subject," said Homer.

"Studied *what*?" asked Risely.

"Engineering. They know all about how engines are to be made—and railroads, and bridges, and tunnels, and piers—and everything of that sort."

"Then I don't want to be an engineer," said Risely.

"I mean to be a stoker or a driver."

"We will see," said Mr. Cunningham. "Perhaps you may change your mind again."

"No, Papa. I shall always want that."

"The stokers and drivers have not at all an easy life," said Miss Erskine. "They have hard work, and are out in all sorts of weather, and often want more rest, and the least bit of carelessness on their part may cause an accident and the death of a great many people."

"I wish you would tell me some stories about them," said Risely.

"Some day I will."

"Before you go?" asked Risely. "Do you know a great many stories?"

"Yes."

"Then I wish you *were* the New Lady after all."

Miss Erskine looked at Mr. Cunningham, and he said,—

"The children are expecting a kind lady to come and take care of them in the place of Miss Cox, and they generally call her the New Lady. Risely hopes you will look after him a little until she comes, but he begins to wish that you were the New Lady herself."

"O I see!" and Miss Erskine smiled, and looked pleased. "I hope we shall get along nicely, just so long as we *are* together at all events."

No more was said just then about the matter. Tea being over, they went into the drawing-room. Risely climbed the back of his Papa's arm-chair, and had a game of romps, while Una sat on his knee. Miss Erskine took some work out of her pocket, but she was too busy watching and smiling to get much done. Homer sat on the sofa opposite, with his face down upon the arm, and presently Mr. Cunningham looked across and said,—

"Too much noise?"

"No."

"Shall you be fit for the journey to-morrow?"

"O yes."

"O Homer, do say, 'No!' O please do," cried both children.

"You are likely to make it 'no' at that rate," said Mr. Cunningham. "Stop, Risely."

Mr. Cunningham pulled him forwards, and Risely came head over heels down upon the floor with what he thought a delightful bump.

"You are *sure*?" said Mr. Cunningham. "I should not like to put off the journey for nothing, but still——"

"There's nothing the matter," said Homer, starting up. "I'm going out on the lawn. It is so stuffy in here."

Mr. Cunningham looked after him gravely.

"That is a very nice boy," said Miss Erskine.

"I don't know a nicer; but his health is a great anxiety to his father."

"Is he the only boy?"

"The only one. He has two sisters."

"And he has been ill lately?"

"Dangerously. They never thought he would pull through."

"He drudges too hard," was Risely's opinion, given with an important air.

"He has a well-shaped head," said Miss Erskine. "I should suppose him to be a boy of talent."

"Very considerable talent; and never daunted by hard work. In fact, the illness was the result of over-work. But his father tells me the boy has never been thoroughly himself since his mother's death."

"How long ago?"

"A year or more."

Risely found the conversation uninteresting, and having vainly pulled his father's sleeve to gain attention, he ran away. Una nestled closer to Mr. Cunningham.

"I love Homer," she said.

"He has been kind to you, hasn't he?" said Mr. Cunningham.

"Yes. O I like him so much, Papa."

"So do his sisters. They think there never was such a boy in all the world."

"*Was* there?" asked Una.

"I hope, so. But he certainly is a boy of uncommonly good principle. I hope Risely may turn out as well."

"Papa, are Homer's sisters like him?" asked Una.

"A little. Not so like him as you are."

"Me, Papa?" said Una.

"Yes; he is very like you. And you—you are the image of your mother."

"I'm glad," whispered Una, and yet a lump came into her throat, for she did not like to see her father look so melancholy. Also she felt half afraid. Mr. Cunningham had never before spoken to her on this subject. He hardly ever mentioned his wife.

"I am glad too," said Mr. Cunningham sadly; and he stroked Una's curls, repeating, "Very very like."

"Is Homer very very like, too?" Una asked gently.

"Yes."

"And do you like him because of that?"

"I think so," said Mr. Cunningham. "I like him for his own sake, as well."

"Papa," said Una, and she hid her face on his shoulder. "Papa——"

"Yes, my little girl."

"Papa——"

Una burst out crying. Miss Erskine gave them one look, and then went quietly out of the room. Mr. Cunningham folded Una quite tight in his arms, and said,—

"What is the matter with my little girlie?"

"Papa, I do remember my Mamma," sobbed Una, with a great effort. "And I love her."

"Every one loved her. But I don't think you can remember her, dear. You were too young."

"I can, Papa," repeated Una.

Mr. Cunningham kissed away the tears silently. This was a new view of his little Una, and it gave him pain and pleasure together. He did not quite know whether to carry on the conversation. He could not bear to see her cry, and yet he wanted to know her better. He seemed touching upon a part of her here that had never been opened to him before.

"What do you remember, Una?" he asked.

"She used to kiss me, Papa, and hug me. And you put me on her bed—and she said something—and she said, 'Don't forget!'"

Una's heart went pit-a-pat very fast. Was it possible that she might now find out those forgotten words of her mother's?

"Yes, you are right, Una. And you remember that?"

"I don't know what she said," whispered Una. "*I did* forget."

"Of course you did, darling. I wonder you remember anything about it; you were so young."

Una hoped Mr. Cunningham would go on, but he stopped.

"Please, Papa, what did Mamma tell me not to forget?" asked Una, so low that he could hardly hear.

"She talked to you for some minutes, my dear. I am afraid I don't recall very accurately. I know she told you she was going to heaven, and she hoped you would go

too ; and she said—you must trust in the merits of the Redeemer."

"Did she say those very words?" asked Una.

"No, dear. I have not a good memory for words."

"I don't know exactly what that is," said Una, sitting up and looking intent. "Did she mean that the Lord Jesus died for me, and would take me to heaven?"

"Yes," said Mr. Cunningham, after an astonished pause.

"And would Mamma have taught me that, if she had been alive now?" asked Una.

"No doubt, my dear."

"Homer has taught me," said Una. "Mamma would be glad, wouldn't she?"

Mr. Cunningham was silent. He passed his hand over the little girl's hair, and Una's head went back to its resting-place.

"Homer has taught me, and I love Homer," she said.

"He has given me a beautiful Bible, and I always read it every day. And I *do* love the Lord Jesus now, Papa—and you love Him too, you know, and so does Homer; and He will take us all to heaven some day. Won't He?"

"I hope so," said Mr. Cunningham rather huskily.

"Won't it be nice to see my Mamma and Homer's Mamma in heaven?" said Una. "Poor Homer can't bear to speak of his Mamma, because she has died. But nobody will cry there. I do feel so glad now that I needn't be frightened to die, because Homer has told me all about the Lord Jesus."

"My dear, little girls like you need not think about dying," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Don't they die sometimes?" asked Una.

"I should be sorry if Homer had made you morbid on the subject—always thinking about it, I mean. Little girls should not be melancholy."

"But I'm not melancholy," said Una. "And Homer isn't either. He is as merry as can be. I used to feel a great deal more melancholy when I didn't know how I should ever get to heaven."

"Why did you never ask anybody to help you out of your perplexity, my dear?"

"I asked Nurse one day, Papa, and she said I must be good. And I couldn't be good."

"Don't leave off being a merry little girl, Una," said Mr. Cunningham uneasily.

"No," said Una, shaking her head. "I think, if you wouldn't ever go away, I shouldn't *ever* be grave. But you are going to-morrow, and Homer too." And Una's eyes filled.

"Come, we will go and see what they are all after in the garden," said Mr. Cunningham, getting up and walking into the hall, the front-door of which stood open. "Ah, there is Miss Erskine on the lawn, and Risely running after a butterfly."

Miss Erskine was sitting on a chair which Homer had fetched, and Homer was lying on the grass, making a loop-chain of dandelion-stalks. As soon as Una came near he pulled her down beside him, and hung it round her neck.

"O Homer, where *did* you get so many stalks?"

"Risely wanted employment, so I offered him a penny for fifty."

"Then that was why he didn't come back in the

drawing-room," said Una, looking at Homer rather shyly, for she was afraid he would see that she had been crying.

"Go and get me a chair, Risely," said Mr. Cunningham. "All right again, Homer?"

"Up to another race with Una, if she wants it."

"I'd rather not," Una sedately answered, and then they sat and talked, and everybody tried to make everybody else cheerful, so the evening was not a dull one.

Una felt dull, though, when she went upstairs to bed—too dull to heed Nurse's praises of Miss Erskine. She did not think she had ever loved her Papa so much as since that evening's talk, and it gave her a heart-ache to think of missing Homer's face about the house. And in the morning when she came downstairs, she was still more dull. Homer could hardly make her smile at all.

Breakfast over, they all stood on the doorstep. Mr. Cunningham pulled on his gloves slowly. Homer was talking fast, and joking. Risely felt queer inside, and had to make odd grimaces to master a certain inclination to cry. Poor little Una had quite given over any attempt to master *her* inclination, and looked on with tears running hopelessly down her cheeks.

"Una, I do wish you wouldn't," said Homer once to her in a low voice; but it was of no use to wish, for she could not help it.

"Una, you will make me cry too," said Mr. Cunningham. "And there is no need, for I shall be coming again before long, and Homer will pay you another visit some day."

Una squeezed her hands together, but could not speak.

"I hope Risely is going to be a very good boy," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Yes, Papa," said Risely.

"That means an obedient boy," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa, I do what I'm told very often," said Risely.

"It must be *always*, not only very often. I hope you will both be very pleasant to the New Lady."

"When is she coming, Papa?" asked Risely, making a queer face again.

"Ask Miss Erskine."

"When will she, Miss Erskine?"

"When I grow tired of you, and you of me," said Miss Erskine.

"Will you *really* stay and keep away the New Lady till then?" asked Risely in astonishment. "O we shan't ever be tired of you. We like you much better than the New Lady; don't we, Una?"

"Yes," said Una.

"What should you say if this were the New Lady herself?" asked Mr. Cunningham.

"Papa! *is* she?" exclaimed Risely.

"Yes."

"But she hasn't grey curls," said Risely.

"I didn't tell you the New Lady had grey curls," said Mr. Cunningham, kissing his little boy and girl, in a great hurry. "You told me that. I only asked you if you *liked* grey curls. Say good-bye quickly, Homer. We must be off. Good-bye, Risely. Good-bye, my little girl. Miss Erskine is going to be the kindest friend you ever had. Don't cry, darling. Just look what a state the white horse is in to be off; and Homer is as white as the horse this morning. Come, we shall miss our train. Be *very* good children."

And they were gone. Homer looked back, waving his

cap, and Mr. Cunningham nodded his head. Risely's face puckered, and Una sobbed abundantly. Miss Erskine put an arm round her neck, and a hand on Risely's shoulder, and led them back into the house. The garden looked so desolate.

"Now I want you both to come with me," she said. "I have to unpack my big box, and I am going to ask your help in arranging my things. I have some pretty china ornaments that you will like to see, and a picture-book for each of you, quite for your own. And when that is all done, you must show me over the house and garden, because I hardly know my way about yet, and then we will have a long walk, either before or after dinner."

"Need we do lessons to-day?" asked Risely, brightening up.

"O no! not to-day. To-morrow and next day I will find out a little of what you know, but we shall not begin regular work till Monday."

That was comforting to Risely, and Miss Erskine's kisses were comforting to Una. The unpacking of the box was a very interesting matter, and Miss Erskine was so bright and amusing that tears soon gave place to smiles. The day passed more quickly than Una could have believed possible, and when the evening came she was quite surprised to think how happy she and Risely had been.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW THINGS DID NOT ALWAYS GO STRAIGHT.

THE rest of that week passed happily. Everybody in the house liked Miss Erskine, and Nurse had not one word to say against her. She was so kind and pleasant that this was no wonder.

Risely seemed to be in one of his very best moods. He was so delighted with the long walks which Miss Erskine took him, and the stories she told him, and the new games she taught him, that he was quite like a different little boy, and did just whatever he was told. Nurse seemed quite surprised at the change, and wondered how long it would last.

Sunday went just as smoothly. It was the happiest Sunday Una had ever spent. In the morning Miss Erskine walked to Church with the children over the fields, and in the afternoon she read aloud to them. She read a story-book, not like Una's fairy tales, but with a great deal of sweet teaching in it about the Lord Jesus. Una could have listened all day.

When Risely grew restless Miss Erskine brought out a delightful new Sunday map, which kept him and Una busy for an hour. Mr. Cunningham had asked her to supply the children with such books and employments as they needed.

After that they had a little stroll in the garden. And when tea was over Risely, of his own free will, came and sat beside Miss Erskine on the lawn, and made no noise all the evening. Miss Erskine read again, and talked, and told Bible stories in such bright fresh language that Risely was charmed. He thought he could have listened for a whole day.

Una felt exceedingly happy when she went to bed that night. She was beginning to love Miss Erskine dearly.

On Monday morning lessons were started. Miss Erskine arranged a regular plan. At a quarter past eight the bell rang for prayers. After prayers came breakfast. As soon as breakfast was over, Miss Erskine took out the children for a quick walk along the roads. She did not allow games and scrambles then, but just went as far as was possible in the time, and made a point of being back at ten minutes before ten.

At ten o'clock lessons began and lasted till twelve. Then the children might play in the garden until dinner-time. After dinner they were free till a quarter before three. Then came another hour of lessons, and at a quarter to four Miss Erskine took them for a regular ramble, until half-past five. They had each two or three easy lessons to learn, which could be done after twelve in the morning, or after tea in the evening, and that was all.

Many little girls and boys of their age have longer lessons than this. But Miss Erskine knew that they were used to free lives, and she did not want to tie them down too quickly to hard work. She thought it best to begin gradually.

Monday was spent chiefly in finding out how much the children did or did not know. Una was very shy at first, and Risely very confident. But it somehow happened that Una almost always had her answers ready before Risely could think of anything to say, and after a while he whispered impatiently, "You *mustn't* be so quick, Una!"

"That will not do," said Miss Erskine. "I want to know how much you have really learnt; and if Una does not try her best, she will be treating me not quite honestly, and treating you as a baby. You must both try your very best."

But try as Risely might he could not overtake Una. She seemed to remember anything she was asked in a moment, and Risely could not remember at all. His geography was all in confusion, and the multiplication table had gone quite out of his head, and French words were nowhere to be found, and historical names seemed never to belong to the right persons.

The truth was, Una had always learnt her lessons much more carefully than Risely had done. Perhaps also she was naturally the quickest of the two, though this had never before been found out. And Risely was so afraid of its being supposed to be the case, that he said to her very earnestly when lessons were over:

"You don't know a bit more than me, really, Una. I shall beat you next time. And I could to-day, if I had tried harder."

"Yes, Risely dear," said Una. "Please do try harder next time, because, you know, I *mustn't* keep from trying. It wouldn't be right."

"I mean to do everything all right to-morrow," said

Risely. "And Miss Erskine will see ! Boys can always do best if they like."

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday passed pleasantly. Lessons were new, and Miss Erskine had a particularly interesting manner of teaching, and Risely was amused and in a good temper.

Also he was very anxious to outstrip Una. He had quite set his heart upon doing so, and he thought at first that it would be easy. He really did try hard, but Una tried hard too, and Risely found himself still second.

Risely did not approve of that at all. For a day or two it made him put out all his powers. But though he disliked being second, he disliked steady work no less, and between the two he began to be annoyed. He was getting tired of trying, and he felt annoyed with Una for doing better than himself, and vexed with Miss Erskine for choosing to set lessons that Una *could* do better than he.

So Risely came downstairs on Thursday with a pout on his face. Una knew the pout well. Miss Erskine had never seen it on Risely's face before, but she had seen it on other little boys' faces, and she quite understood what it meant.

She took no notice, however, but poured out the tea, and cut the bread and butter, and chatted to the children as brightly as usual. Una answered her, but Risely lounged back in his chair, and kicked the rungs, and mumbled when he was spoken to.

It was a beautiful day, very warm and sunshiny. That was almost a misfortune ; it made Risely wish so much that he had no lessons to do. The wish grew stronger and stronger all breakfast-time, till he wanted a holiday

desperately, and felt as if he would like to toss all his lesson-books down the old well in the back-garden. The well was covered with boards, but Risely sat slowly munching his bread and butter, and picturing in his mind how perfectly delightful it would be to make a little hole somehow through the boarding. Then he could push in one book after another, and hear each in turn splash down into the water far below, and never have to learn anything out of them again. No, never!

"I don't see the good of lessons," said Risely.

Miss Erskine knew from his face that to go into a discussion just then would be of no use at all, so she said cheerfully,—

"A great many little boys don't."

"They're no good at all; and I don't care about being clever," said Risely. "I don't care one bit."

"If you are not clever, you cannot make yourself so," said Miss Erskine, with a smile. "So it is wisest not to mind that, but just to make the best use of whatever powers you have."

Risely did not like this, for he thought himself extremely clever.

"I shan't drudge over my lesson-books like Homer," he said. "Una can; I don't mean to."

The postman was seen coming through the garden, and Risely went for the letters. He counted it his right to go. But instead of rushing merrily out of the room after his usual fashion, he went lazily, catching at different pieces of furniture, as if he felt quite too fatigued and depressed to walk upright, and pulling chairs awry.

"Risely won't be good to-day," said Una sorrowfully in his absence.

"How do you know, my dear?" asked Miss Erskine.

"He is often like that, Miss Erskine."

"Well,—Una will be good," said Miss Erskine, touching the little girl's cheek.

"I'll try," said Una earnestly.

Risely dragged himself back with three letters. Two were addressed to "Miss Una Cunningham," and one to "Miss Erskine." Risely did not seem inclined to give up both Una's. He was sure one must be for him. Why shouldn't he have one as well as Una? It was too bad that Una should get two, and he none. Risely considered this arrangement highly unfair.

Miss Erskine put out her hand and took the letters before Risely saw what she was going to do. He pouted more, but said nothing. Una was greatly pleased, only Risely's annoyance spoilt her pleasure a good deal.

Una and Miss Erskine had both finished their breakfast, so they had time to read their letters while Risely was finishing his. One of Una's was from her Papa, and she read that aloud. Mr. Cunningham wrote a pretty clear hand, and his letters were always short.

"MY DEAR LITTLE UNA,

"I think I promised to send you soon a line. I hope you are both quite well, and very good children, and do all Miss Erskine tells you. I am very busy indeed this week, or I should have written sooner.

"I could not stay at Lissolm Vicarage for more than one night. Your uncle and cousins were much pleased to have Homer back, and thought him better for the change. I shall be in London a few days more, and then I expect to go into Wales.

"I have no news that my little girl will care to hear. Tell Risely to write to me, and I will answer him. Remember me to Miss Erskine.

"I remain,

"Your affectionate Father,

"R. CUNNINGHAM."

"I shan't," said Risely. "Papa ought to write to *me*. He wrote to you last time. It isn't fair."

"I wonder what Homer says," observed Una, unfolding another sheet and casting a timid glance at Risely.

"I don't like Homer," said Risely.

That being the case, Una read his letter to herself. Homer had been at the pains to print it all through, so that she could make it out easily.

"*Lissolm Vicarage,*

"*Wednesday.*

"MY DEAR UNA,

"Don't you want a letter? Of course you do.

"Well, you shall have it. There are such lots to say, that I don't know which end to begin at. I had a *tremendous* welcome from the young ones, and Carrie nearly squeezed my head off my shoulders. Everybody is immensely grateful for your nursing. Carrie says I'm to say that she loves you. Father says I'm not the same boy, but he doesn't explain whether the other boy or this boy is the real Homer Granville. Neither, perhaps.

"How is the Pickle getting on? I hope he isn't in any particular mischief this morning. There was once a little boy who fell into a wash-tub, and had to go to bed. I am glad the orchard wall is spiked over—less chance of

my two small cousins getting themselves 'drowned,' as our old gardener calls it. 'Drowning' in mud wouldn't be pleasant.

"How do you both like lessons? I expect Risely will be half frantic with joy at getting back to his beloved books. Tell him clever boys always like learning. It's dunces that don't.

"Alice has gone and locked up all my lesson books, and isn't *that* something to cry about? If I were Risely I should kick—only it isn't gentlemanly. The best present you could send me would be half a dozen nice cambric pocket-handkerchiefs for weeping into. Father won't hear school mentioned yet. Heigho! I wish I liked holidays as much as Risely does.

"Alice says I am to leave off, so here goes. Give my compliments to the black hen, and my love to everybody else. Ask Risely what it is that improves dogs, boys, and walnut trees; and recommend Miss Erskine to try. It's a splendid recipe. I can't help this big blot. Carrie is taking hold of the end of my pen, and looking exactly like you in a fit of the dolefuls. So I really must stop, requesting you to believe me, always and ever,

"Your most particularly affectionate Cousin,

"HOMER GRANVILLE."

"Homer's spirits seem inexhaustible," said Miss Erskine, laughing, when Una had handed her the letter to read. "Now, dear, put it away. We must dress at once for our walk."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THINGS WENT STILL MORE CROOKED.

"PLEASE, Miss Erskine, may we go to Tilton Lane this morning?" asked Risely, as they started. He looked straight at Miss Erskine with a pair of rather defiant eyes, and bit the stalk of a pink between his teeth.

"No," said Miss Erskine. "We are late to-day, and there is not time for Tilton Lane."

"But I want to go," said Risely.

Miss Erskine made no answer. She walked through the garden, talking of other things. Outside the garden-gate she turned to the right. Risely stopped, for his wish was to turn to the left.

"Come, Risely," said Miss Erskine.

"I want to go to Tilton Lane."

"Not to-day, for we have not time."

Miss Erskine walked on with Una, and Risely followed slowly.

"We went on Monday," he said in a complaining voice. "I don't see why we shouldn't go to-day."

"Breakfast was finished early on Monday. When you want a longer walk, you must not be so slow about your breakfast."

"I think if we start later, we ought to get back later," said Risely.

"What! reward little boys for dawdling, by shortening lessons! O that would never do," said Miss Erskine.

"I think it would," said Risely.

Miss Erskine again did not answer. She was talking to Una, and presently Risely drew a little nearer to hear what she was saying. He saw that she had some leaves in her hands, and he found that she was explaining to Una about these leaves. He heard her say something about each leaf having a great number of little pores, or holes, through which the tree breathed.

Risely could not help feeling interested, and he would have liked to go close, and hear it all; but ill-temper was too strong. He thought that would look like giving in, and it never struck him that the most manly and most graceful thing he could do would be to give in then and there. It is a curious thing how often little boys and girls in a naughty mood punish themselves. Risely would have greatly enjoyed listening, but he would not let himself have the pleasure.

So he only dragged his feet moodily through the dust behind, frowning at Una whenever she cast back an anxious look. Presently Miss Erskine sent Una running on in front to pick a few flowers. Risely was so afraid of a private talk with Miss Erskine on the state of his feelings, that he started off at full speed and joined Una.

"Isn't this pretty?" said Una, showing a tiny bunch of blue birdseyes.

"No, they're stupid," said Risely. "They tumble all to bits in a moment. Look!"

He seized Una's wrist and shook it. Down fell a little shower of blue stars.

"O Risely, I'm so sorry. Why did you?"

"They ain't worth anything," said Risely. "What did Homer write to you about?"

"I'll read the letter all through to you, if you like," said Una, pulling it out of her pocket.

"Come on," said Risely. "I don't want to be near Miss Erskine."

Una wondered why, but obeyed. The two walked along, side by side, and Una read the letter aloud.

"It isn't clever a bit," said Risely. "*I* could write cleverer than that. And he means *me* by 'Pickle,' and I don't like it. I'm not 'pickle.'

"He only means a little fun, Risely dear."

"He doesn't," said Risely.

When Risely was in this mood he followed always one simple rule, and that was to contradict everything that was said. Being a very easy rule to follow, and needing no particular cleverness, he found it a great relief to his own feelings. Una wisely held her tongue. The four little feet went on in silence; Una's black shoes and white stockings picking their way daintily, while Risely's stout boots shovelled the dust before them in a reckless fashion.

"And he means that he wants me to have a beating," said Risely presently.

"O no, Risely."

"He does," said Risely.

Another pause.

"And I mean to get along that wall some day," said Risely. "I shall, so he needn't talk."

"O no ! you can't."

"I mean to."

"You might be dreadfully hurt, Risely darling."

"No, I shouldn't."

"It wouldn't be right to try."

"Yes, it would."

Una had no more to say. She fell back presently to Miss Erskine's side, and Risely walked on alone.

The house was reached as usual by ten minutes before ten, and Una was ready as usual by ten. All her books were out on the table, and Risely's also, though not placed by himself. Risely was busied in a long struggle with his boots. The boot-laces were so slow in being untied, that it really seemed as if they sympathised with their little master in the wish for a longer walk.

Lessons went heavily that morning, so far as Risely was concerned. He had learnt well what he had to say, but he would not say it well. Miss Erskine gave him an easy sum, but he did not choose to do it. Every word of French seemed to have gone out of his head, and not a word of history could Miss Erskine get into his head.

The two hours were wasted. Una worked busily, though with a troubled face, but Risely did nothing at all.

Miss Erskine took the matter very quietly. She went on teaching Una, and left Risely almost to himself. Risely watched her, and wondered what she would do. It had been Miss Cox' custom to look rather pitiful at such times, but Miss Erskine did not look pitiful at all. Once or twice she fixed her eyes gravely on Risely in a way which made him feel uncomfortable, and then she left him alone again.

Twelve o'clock came, and Una jumped up. Risely

jumped up too. Miss Erskine turned to him and said,—

“Do you think you deserve your game in the garden, Risely?”

Risely was at a loss how to answer. He stared hard at Miss Erskine.

“You have not been a good boy this morning,” said Miss Erskine. “As it is the first time, I shall not punish you. I do not think you will feel very happy in the garden, but you may go. If these lessons are not done in the afternoon, you will do them in the evening.”

Risely certainly did not feel happy. The garden looked dull, and games were stupid, and nothing seemed pleasant. Una tried in vain to coax him back to a good temper. He would not run races, or dig in his bed, or do anything but loiter about and grumble.

Miss Erskine was reading near the drawing-room window. She liked to be at hand when the children were playing in the garden. They could see her, and she could see them, a great part of the time.

She heard the voices, and remarked how different they were from the merry tones which often came through the open window. Presently she heard Risely say,—

“I don’t care. I shan’t say my lessons if I don’t choose. I shall do as I choose. Miss Erskine can’t *make* me. I don’t like to be made to do things. I don’t see what right Miss Erskine has. And I won’t be punished. I don’t like people who punish, and I don’t see the good of punishments. I shall say my lessons when I choose, and not before.”

It would have been amusing to hear such a boastful speech from such a little boy, if it had been less sad.

But Miss Erskine felt it to be very sad. She put down her book, and looked out of the window, and sighed; for she was beginning to love the children already, and she wanted to make them a happy home. And how could she do so, if Risely were bent on his own way, and determined to fight for it? Punishment and sorrow must come side by side with wilfulness.

"Poor little boy! he is motherless," thought Miss Erskine pityingly. "He does not know better. I must try and teach him better, and I will ask God to help me. I want Risely to love me. But one thing is certain, he *must* learn to obey. He has disobeyed me very often the last few days in little things, and I have not liked to say much just at first. But now that he knows me, I am afraid the time has come for stricter training. Poor dear little Risely!"

But of course Risely could not hear these thoughts, or see the kind tears in Miss Erskine's eyes.

After hearing what Risely said, Miss Erskine was not at all surprised to see him come to his lessons in the afternoon, much as he had come in the morning. Nothing went well, and nothing was done.

Miss Erskine again said very little. At the usual time she took the children out for their second walk. Risely felt relieved that lessons were over, and he began to get in high spirits. But when he came to Miss Erskine, and wanted to choose where to go, she said gently, "No, I shall choose to-day myself." And when he asked her to tell stories, as usual, she answered just as gently, "Not to-day, Risely. I cannot reward you to-day, for you have not been good. I will tell Una some stories after tea, while you are doing your lessons."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW FOLKS CAN'T ALWAYS HAVE THEIR OWN WAY.

RISELY objected greatly to this treatment, for he did not know how to meet it. He was particularly fond of stories, and the walk without any felt dull. Miss Erskine was so quiet that he could not call her angry, but she looked grave, and she did not make fun for the children as on other days.

The idea of lessons after tea went much against Risely's notions of what was agreeable. He thought and fumed, and fumed and thought, till he had almost made up his mind that he would not do anything of the kind, let Miss Erskine say what she liked. He never had done so before. Why should he now?"

Risely was brewing schemes for escape all tea-time, with puckered brow and discontented mouth. Miss Erskine and Una talked, but he did not listen to them. Tea being over, Miss Erskine said,—

"Run into the garden, Una dear. I am coming to you presently."

Then she put her hand on Risely's shoulder, and walked with him into the drawing-room. Risely was puzzled, and went.

"The dining-room will not be ready for a few minutes,"

said Miss Erskine. "You and I must have a little talk meantime."

"I don't like lessons in the evening, Miss Erskine," said Risely, as Miss Erskine made him sit down on a chair in front of her.

"No, my dear, I expect not. You don't like lessons at any time, but that is no reason for leaving them. People often have to do things they don't like."

"Miss Cox never made me do lessons in the evening," said Risely.

"Miss Cox is not here now."

"I wish she *was*," said Risely.

"Perhaps you will not wish that another time," said Miss Erskine. "Has this been a very happy day, Risely?"

"No," said Risely.

"Why not?"

"I don't like lessons, and you didn't tell me stories."

"Why did I not?"

"Because I didn't do my lessons," said Risely, fidgeting.

"Why did you not?"

"I didn't want—"

"But if I tell you to do one thing, and you want to do another, which ought you to do?"

"I don't like to be *made*," said Risely in a low voice.

"Which ought you to do?"

Risely was silent.

"Do you think it was right to follow your own way and disobey me?"

Risely could not say it was. He gave no reply.

"I wish to have some sort of answer, Risely."

"I don't see why I'm to be made to do things," said Risely, turning hot.

"I see. You think you are old enough to decide for yourself. Not an uncommon notion among little boys," answered Miss Erskine. "It is grand and manly to be disobedient, isn't it, Risely? You think you are acting in a fine independent spirit, don't you?"

Risely hung his head slightly.

"Well, we must go into that question more fully another time. But tell me just now—is there anybody in the world whom you ought to obey?"

"Papa," said Risely.

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes," Risely answered, with some wonder.

"Yes, you are right. 'Children, obey your parents,' is God's commandment. But when your Papa is away, whom does he expect you to obey?"

Risely held his tongue.

"Who placed me here over you, to teach you and take care of you?"

"Papa," said Risely.

"Then he has given me authority over you—that means, the right to be obeyed. God gave your Papa his authority over his children, and your Papa can *pass on* that right to anybody else that he chooses. Do you understand? He can say, 'Here is somebody that you must obey; in disobeying her, you disobey me.'"

Risely looked hard at Miss Erskine.

"Then, when you disobey Nurse or me, whom do you really disobey?"

"Papa," said Risely again.

"Yes, and when you disobey Papa, you disobey God."

"Miss Erskine, if Papa told me I was to do a bad thing, I oughtn't to do it," said Risely.

"Very true, my dear, because obedience to God must come first of all," said Miss Erskine. "You can't obey God by doing wrong. But was that your reason to-day? Did you think it wrong to do your lessons?"

"No," mumbled Risely, turning very red.

Miss Erskine sat silent for a minute, while Risely looked longingly out of the window. He could see a lilac print frock sauntering about the lawn, with a brown hat above, drooping in rather a depressed style.

"Now we must come to the point," said Miss Erskine suddenly. "I have the right to be obeyed, and I expect to be obeyed. I have given you certain lessons to do, and you have not chosen to do them. It is not because you can't; but because you won't."

Risely fixed his eyes on the floor. There was a bunch of red roses in the carpet just under his feet, and he began tracing the outline of the bunch with his toe. It was quite an interesting work—all the ins and outs had to be followed so carefully. He had to tilt his chair and stretch out his leg to reach the further part of the bunch, and his body needed some careful balancing.

"If you choose to disobey, and leave the lessons undone, what am I to do, Risely?"

Risely went on tracing his flowers diligently.

"You see I cannot *make* you learn them, if you do not choose to do so."

That did astonish Risely. He felt it to be true, but he had not expected Miss Erskine to own to the fact. She certainly could not *force* the lessons into his head, if he were resolutely bent on keeping them out. He forgot

the red flowers and stopped short, with tilted chair and out-stretched feet, to gaze at Miss Erskine.

"No," repeated Miss Erskine, with a little shake of her head. "I can't make you. Nobody can make another learn a lesson if he does not choose. And yet you have to learn lessons, and it is my duty to see that they are learnt. What ought I to do!"

"What shall you, Miss Erskine?" asked Risely, feeling it to be an important question.

"I shall give you a choice," said Miss Erskine.

"A choice?" repeated Risely.

"Yes. I cannot say to you: 'This lesson *shall* be learnt, whether you will or no;' for if you will not, I cannot force it into your head. But I can say to you, 'Risely, my command is that you learn this lesson. Take your choice. Either you obey me, and play in the garden, and hear stories,—or you disobey me and don't play in the garden, and don't hear stories.'"

"I want to go in the garden to-night," said Risely, feeling a little choky.

"And I want you to go. But that cannot be helped. You must take your choice. If you like to work hard for half-an-hour, you may have a game in the garden after. If you like not to work hard, then you will go upstairs to your room instead."

"I shouldn't!" said Risely.

"O yes," said Miss Erskine, quite calmly. "That would not be a matter of obedience, because if you did not wish to walk upstairs, Kirby could carry you."

Risely's eyes twinkled, half with anger and half with tears. He did not know what he meant to do.

Miss Erskine bent forward and took his face between

her two hands. She looked at it very earnestly for a few seconds, and kissed it.

"Risely, are you going to be a good obedient little boy, or are you going to make us all unhappy? I don't want to punish you. But if you are disobedient, I *must* punish you."

"I don't like punishments," said Risely, half-crying.

"I don't like them either," said Miss Erskine. "They make me feel very unhappy—quite as unhappy as the person being punished. But you must take your choice. Obedience with reward—or disobedience with punishment. I can't force you to be a good little boy against your will. I can only resolve that you shall not find naughtiness pleasant."

"Will I have a reward to-night if I am good?" asked Risely.

"Yes; so I told you. A good game in the garden will be your reward. To-morrow, if you are good, we shall have nicer walks and story-telling."

"Well—I mean to be," said Risely, with a great effort.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW THINGS BECAME QUITE STRAIGHT.

THE half-hour came to an end, and Risely's lessons were done ; that is to say, as many of them as Miss Erskine had said must be done that day. Yes ; after sitting over them in vain for three whole hours, Risely finished off quite nicely in one half-hour.

Risely gave Miss Erskine a boisterous kiss, and went rushing into the garden, feeling like a soda-water bottle with the cork just drawn. He could not contain himself, and Una ran after him, no less full of glee.

"Una, let's have a race," said Risely. "I feel so dreadfully happy."

Three times round the front lawn scampered the merry pair. Risely flung his arms and legs about, and galloped from side to side, and lost his race by so doing. Then they tried again, and Risely won.

"O I haven't watered my garden," said Risely suddenly.

"No," said Una. "I watered mine ; but I didn't know if you would like me to water yours. I filled both our two pots, and I can go on filling for you, to save time."

The two children raced away to the garden, and Risely set to work upon his thirsty plants. As soon as he had

emptied one of the two small red watering-cans, Una ran with it to the pump. She had plenty of running to and fro during the next ten minutes. Once Risely kept her to listen to a remark which he wanted to make.

"I feel quite good to-night, Una. And it's very nice. I mean to be always good now."

"But nobody is ever really good," objected Una, dangling an empty watering-can from one hand.

"You mayn't be. I am," said Risely. "I feel as good as good can be to-night."

Una stood lost in thought, while Risely slowly emptied the other can. Then he looked round.

"Why, Una, you haven't got any more water. You stupe! Don't you see I'm waiting?" demanded Risely angrily.

The goodness must have seemed to Una rather feeble in kind. Sharp words always brought tears springing to her eyes, but she turned to run for the water. And then she said, "O look!"

For there was Miss Erskine coming along the path, with her dress tucked up, and the biggest green watering-pot of all held in both her hands. And when she set it down, they saw that it was full of water.

"There," she said. "Now you can fill your little pot from that, Risely. Una's legs must be tired."

"Are they? I didn't think of that," said Risely.

"Thank you, Miss Erskine," said Una softly; and Risely too said, "Thank you."

"That is satisfactory," remarked Miss Erskine. "I always feel refreshed by politeness."

"How funny you are!" said Risely. "I thought people only got refreshed when they have been tired."

"I am tired to-night," said Miss Erskine. "It has been a fatiguing day."

Risely thought he understood. He grew very red, and plunged his little can into the big one.

"Homer is polite, isn't he?" said Una.

"Homer is a thorough gentleman," said Miss Erskine.

"Why, Miss Erskine, Homer isn't a gentleman, he is a boy," said Risely, spilling a little deluge over his own knickerbockers.

"Take care, Risely. Yes, he is a thorough boy too; but that does not prevent his being a gentleman."

"I wish he lived here always," said Una. "I do love Homer."

Risely was so busy with his watering that Una left him, and went to Miss Erskine. It was getting a little dusky. The children often stayed up past their regular bedtime on these long summer evenings. Nurse used to delay calling them in.

Miss Erskine walked up and down on the grass, and Una slipped a little arm through Miss Erskine's, and walked with her.

This was not the lawn in front of the house, but a larger one at the side, close to the children's gardens. It had no beds in the middle of it, like the front lawn, but only some small three-sided beds near the corners, and a few standard rose-trees here and there. On the further side, away from the children's gardens, ran the carriage drive.

The sun had gone down, leaving behind him some gold tints, which shone still in the western sky behind the house. Overhead all was clear blue, with mackerel streakings away towards the east.

Miss Erskine enjoyed the stillness. A little breeze just fluttered the leaves of the trees now and then, only to die away again. Once in a while there came a faint "twitter—twit" from a small bird, who had failed to get to sleep at his proper time. But the "twit" sounded as if he were so nearly gone off that he could not manage to finish his remark, and very soon that too ceased.

"It is so nice having you here, Miss Erskine," said Una.

"Why, dear?"

"It is nice," said Una. "It makes us happier. Miss Erskine, I don't think it is quite so hard to be good since you came—at least, pretty good. When we had holidays all day, and nobody with us, it did seem so hard."

"I don't wonder, my dear."

"Risely feels good this evening," said Una softly. "He says he does. But he doesn't know that he isn't really."

"He is in a good mood again—not naughty," said Miss Erskine, smiling. "His conscience is easy again, no doubt. That is what he means."

"But nobody is good," said Una.

"No—not if by 'good' you mean without sin."

"I am so happy," said Una, after a pause.

"Why, darling?"

"I think—because—because I love Jesus," said Una, very low. For she knew by this time that Miss Erskine loved Him too.

"And because the Lord Jesus loves Una."

"Yes, that is best, isn't it?"

"Much the best."

"It doesn't *always* seem as if He loved me," said Una. "Sometimes I am quite sure, and sometimes I don't feel the least as if He did."

"I know what that is," said Miss Erskine. "But the comfort is to know that His love never does really change. It is always the same. Our thoughts and feelings about His love change, but His love never changes."

"Not even when I feel as if He didn't love me?" asked Una.

"No. He never stops loving you. If you doubt Him it makes Him sorry, but if you are His little Una He loves you always—always—for ever and ever."

Una smiled quietly to herself.

"Isn't it pleasant to think how everything comes from Him?" said Miss Erskine presently. "This beautiful grass, and the blue sky, and the trees and birds and flowers. He has made them all, and given them to us to be enjoyed."

"Did the Lord Jesus make them?" asked Una. "I thought God did."

"He is God, darling."

"Yes," said Una slowly.

"And He made everything. The Bible says so. 'Without Him was not anything made that was made.'"

"I think I like to know that," said Una. "And does He want us to enjoy things?"

"What do you think? If you made a present, and gave it to Risely, would you like him to enjoy it, or not?"

"O yes," said Una. "Once I made him a bag, and he threw it down in the mud, and said it wasn't worth

having. And it made me feel so bad. He was only a little boy, and didn't know any better."

"No," said Miss Erskine. "But a great many of the gifts of the Lord Jesus are trampled in the mud."

"Are they?" said Una. "Does He mind?"

"I am sure it makes Him sorry," said Miss Erskine.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW RISELY'S KNICKERBOCKERS CAME TO GRIEF.

"I THINK I've been pretty good for some days past," said Risely.

He was seated on the low curved branch of an apple-tree, near the further end of the orchard. Una had gone indoors to learn her lessons before dinner, but Risely thought he would leave his a little longer—perhaps till evening. It might rain in the evening, and now it was fine. He had tried to keep Una out also, but she would not be hindered. Una was learning to say "no" to temptation.

Risely leant his head against the old tree-trunk, and stretched his legs along the bough, and jogged himself up and down. He folded his arms, and felt particularly comfortable,—if only he could quite have forgotten those unlearnt lessons.

"For ever so many days past," repeated Risely. "I haven't had to be punished once—hardly. And all my lessons have been learnt—at least a great many of them. And I haven't slapped anybody, or kicked neither, for one whole week, and I haven't been cross, and I haven't scolded Una, except when she deserved it. She had no business to break my little china monkey off my mantel-

piece. Anybody would have minded that. And I don't see why she need learn her lessons so very, very dreadfully perfect. It makes me feel cross, and then I can't be kind to her of course. I don't learn my lessons so, and she needn't either. But I think it has been a jolly week."

The description of himself was honest, and in Risely's eyes satisfactory. He swung to and fro, smiled blandly at the top bough of the tree, and felt contented.

"If I'm always good, I shan't ever be punished again. And I mean to get ahead of Una too. I'll do it some time. I wish she would be a little stupider, and then it would be quite easy. It is so tiresome. She drudges just like Homer."

The thought came into Risely's head that it might be no unwise plan to go at once, and try the effect of a little of that same "drudging."

"O yes, by-and-by," said Risely, jumping down from the tree, and running to the end of the orchard.

There he stopped, stood still and gazed. Somehow he had not thought much lately about the spikes on the wall. They stared him now in the face, pointing as fiercely as ever upwards and to either side.

Risely stared back, and came to the conclusion that to get over that wall in its present condition would be no easy matter for anybody.

Risely, of course, had no business to dream of such a thing. Letting alone the difficulty, he was strictly forbidden.

But a wish was creeping into his heart, and Risely did not run away from it. He sat down on the grass, propped his chin on his two hands, and looked. He did not say

to himself, "I want to go across." He was not sure yet that he did exactly want it. But he looked, and he looked.

Risely Cunningham to be beaten! It did seem too bad. He had told Una he *would* get over some day. If he did not, she would think he could not. She would think he was afraid.

The first dinner-bell sounded, and Risely sauntered back to the house. He did not feel very bright or very good any longer.

Lessons that afternoon went rather ill. Risely saw spikes wherever he turned.

Rows of spikes came between his eyes and his book, making him read badly, and rows of spikes barred the doorway of his little mind, keeping Miss Erskine's teaching outside.

Miss Erskine did not say much. She gave him a slight amount of extra work for the evening, and that was all. It was less than his carelessness deserved, yet enough to cause deeply injured feelings on his part.

The long afternoon walk did Risely good, and he prepared well after tea. Then he went to take another look at the spikes, and that look did him harm again. The last thing at night and the first thing in the morning he had spikes, spikes, spikes, floating in his brain.

When once a notion took hold of Risely, he could at no time easily shake it off. This notion was folding itself all round his mind. He was beginning to want very much indeed to get across that wall. He had a great longing to prove that he *could* do it.

The idea came first on a Thursday. All Friday he was living in thought opposite the wall. On Saturday he

cared for being good no longer. All he wished was to walk across the wall.

Just once. Just to show that he was able. Just to convince Una that he wasn't beaten. And then he would be quite satisfied.

"I know I shall never feel comfortable in my inside till I have done it," said Risely on Saturday morning, having escaped thither.

But it would be a clear case of disobedience.

"I do mean to be obedient," said Risely. "I have been obedient a great many days. But sometimes I can't be."

What would Miss Erskine say?—and Papa?—and Nurse?

"It serves Nurse right," said Risely. "I'm quite sure it was *her* notion."

What would GOD say?

Risely thought of that, as he would not have done a fortnight earlier. But he pushed the thought away.

"I *must* just get over once," he said. "I won't ever again. I only just want to be able to say I *can*."

Then Una ran up, and he was saved from the danger for the time. Risely did not want her, and spoke snappishly; but Una stayed with him for all that.

In the afternoon they did not walk with Miss Erskine. The Saturday half-holiday was, as a rule, to be given up to weeding and gardening.

The two worked busily together for some time, though Risely, being in a restless state, did not make steady advance like Una. Many weeds remained still in his garden, when hers was cleared. Una offered to help him, and Risely refused. So she went indoors to finish some

of her dearly-loved lessons. No wonder Una outstripped Risely, when she put so much heart into the matter.

Risely made no attempt to keep her. When she was gone, he left his weeds to take care of themselves, and went straight to the farthest end of the orchard.

"I mean to get over," said Risely, half-aloud.

Nobody was within sight or hearing. Risely stood and considered.

"There's room for my feet just between the spikes—just room if I go on tiptoe. I'll walk very slowly, and then I *can't* slip."

It was ticklish work ; how dangerous Risely did not know. That was no excuse. If he did not know the danger of the spikes, he knew the sin of disobedience.

One step—two steps—three steps ! Risely found it even more difficult than he had expected. He began to grow hot and a little nervous. It was no pleasant position to be in. The spikes looked terribly sharp. He could barely manage to plant his toes securely, and balancing himself was not an easy matter.

"Risely ! Risely !" called Una's voice in the distance.

What should he do ? Was she coming ? Had he time to get across ?

"Risely ! Risely !"

The sound came nearer. Risely turned his head.

Just one moment's want of caution, and he lost his footing. Tiptoe walking among spikes is a perilous matter, and steadiness was well-nigh impossible.

Most mercifully Risely did not fall forwards upon the spiked wall, but outwards, and on the side of the wall where the ditch was not deep. It was full of untempting mud and brambles, but Risely stopped short of the

bottom. One of the spikes caught his left knickerbocker, and he found himself hanging in an unpleasant position, with his head rather lower than one heel, and the other leg kicking about wildly.

Risely was a plucky child, and did not scream. One dismayed shout escaped him as he went over. Then he struggled silently.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW RISELY WENT TO BED.

IF Risely thought silence manly, Una was under no such restraint. Hearing Risely's voice she came running up to the spot, and her shriek rang far and wide.

Risely felt his position highly undignified. He could not by any manner of means put on a grand air. He was furiously hot, greatly ashamed, and extremely uncomfortable. To be hung on a wall by one's knickerbocker would be disagreeable at the best of times, and matters were not improved by the thorny slush which lay beneath him. To escape from the spike was to fall into the mud. To get back upon the wall was not possible.

"O Risely! O Risely! you'll tumble," screamed Una. "O do keep quiet! I'm going for Nurse."

"No," shouted Risely, but he shouted in vain. Una flew away with trembling legs.

Risely had not long to wait for her return. But the knickerbocker, not being made to withstand such a strain, was giving way. Risely turned hot and cold, and began to wish Nurse *would* come in time, though how she was to rescue him he did not exactly see.

Voices in the distance sounded, and drew nearer. Risely hoped, and then gave up hope; for the hole in

his knickerbocker was slowly tearing—wider—wider—and down went Risely!

It was not dangerously far to fall, but the mud was soft and deep, and the brambles scratched unmercifully. Risely objected not a little to his enforced bath. He could hardly keep from crying, as he crawled slowly out, and climbed up to the outside of the orchard wall.

By that time Nurse and Miss Erskine and Una had reached the same wall inside the orchard. Nurse pulled over the muddy and miserable little boy with small ado, and then and there gave him a ringing box on his ear. Risely felt so subdued that he began to whimper.

"You naughty boy!" said Nurse. "You very naughty boy! I never did see anything like you in all my life—no, never. You'll come by your death some day. So strict as you've been forbidden, you naughty boy!"

"He is not hurt, is he?" asked Miss Erskine, who looked quite pale with anxiety.

"It wouldn't do any harm to him if he was a little hurt," said Nurse. "Maybe it would make him remember. Well, you are in a nice state, Master Risely—not fit to touch with a pair of tongs."

Risely stood sullenly silent, with half-checked tears.

"Come along!" said Nurse, pulling his shoulder. "Make haste. I'll take off your things, and have you to bed."

"I'm not going to bed," said Risely, stopping.

"You'll have to do as you're told," said Nurse.

"Risely, you have given quite enough trouble already," said Miss Erskine gravely. "Nurse is right. You must go to bed."

"Not for a *punishment*," said Risely dolefully.

"It is the punishment you deserve—and it will most likely save you from a chill."

Risely submitted, for he did not feel in spirits for a fight. Nurse pulled him upstairs to his own room, took off his clothes, washed his face, hands, and hair with some vigorous scrubbing, and finally tucked him up in bed—a clean tame and limp little boy.

Miss Erskine had vanished during these soap-and-water operations, and Nurse now went also, carrying a muddy bundle. Risely lay still, and felt lonely. The sun shone gloriously in through the window, and Risely could not enjoy it. He wished *very* much that he had succeeded in getting over the wall. He wished a *little* that he had never tried it at all.

Nobody came near him for a while. Risely had time to think a good many thoughts—most of them not over comfortable ones.

Presently two little feet walked round the bed-curtain, and Una stood looking at him pityingly.

"Well, you needn't stare," said Risely.

"I didn't mean to stare, darling," said Una. "But Miss Erskine said I might just come in for a minute."

"What for?" asked Risely, feeling cross.

"I thought you would be dull. And I asked her," said Una, checking a little sob. "She said she was coming to you presently, but she didn't know you were ready yet."

"I've been ready heaps of time," said Risely. "And I want to get up."

"I asked her if you might, but she said 'Not yet,'" observed Una.

"You can tell her I'm quite ready," said Risely.
"Nurse went away ever so long ago."

"I don't think she meant only that," Una breathed very low. "I think she meant——"

"Go on," said Risely.

"Whether you were quite ready——"

"Yes," said Risely impatiently.

"For a talk," said Una.

Risely didn't much like the thoughts of that.

"I don't want a talk. I want to get up. I hate bed."

"But if it is good for you, Risely?"

"It isn't."

Both were silent.

"I do wish you hadn't done it," said Una sadly.

Risely was seated in a cross-legged position up against the pillow, with his knees raising the bed-clothes, and his chin resting discontentedly on his hands. He looked at Una, and said,—

"It isn't that I *can't* get across, Una."

Una was at a loss what to say. She was afraid of daring him to further efforts.

"I *can*, you know," said Risely. "I shouldn't have slipped then if you hadn't called. It was so stupid of you. I should have been in the field in a moment, all right. And I could go now—any day. And perhaps I shall some day."

"O no, Risely, you won't."

"I dare say I shall."

"It wouldn't be right ; it would be very naughty," said Una, distressed.

"I don't like to be beaten," said Risely ; "and I

don't like to be in bed. If my drawers weren't locked I could get my Sunday suit, or my brown holland suit, and dress this minute. Nurse locks them on purpose, I do believe. I wish you would get the key from Nurse."

Una sorrowfully felt that her presence was doing no good to Risely. She moved towards the door.

"Are you going to ask Nurse?" said Risely.

"No," said Una. "I can't, Risely. Miss Erskine wouldn't like it."

"I don't care," said Risely. "And you needn't go; I want you to stay."

"But Miss Erskine said I must only stay a minute, Risely dear."

And Una fairly fled, afraid of being wrongly detained. She shut the door, and ran down one flight. Then she walked slowly the rest of the way into the drawing-room.

"Well," said Miss Erskine, looking up; "what did Risely say?"

Una gently told her some of what had passed.

"Ah," said Miss Erskine, "I don't think Risely is ready for me just yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW RISELY WAS NOT BRAVE.

At tea-time Nurse brought Risely a mug of milk and two thick slices of bread-and-butter. Risely asked impatiently when he might get up. Nurse said,—“When Miss Erskine pleases, Master Risely,” and walked away. For Nurse was really frightened at the thought of the danger Risely had been in, and she was quite willing that Miss Erskine should take the matter in hand.

Risely felt greatly inclined to throw his bread-and-butter out of the window, as a token of his displeasure with the world in general. But being hungry, and being, moreover, quite sure that Miss Erskine would in that case allow no third and fourth slices to be cut, he thought better of it.

He ate up the bread-and-butter and drank the milk, with a sense of enjoyment. But after that he began to feel very bad indeed, for this was the time of evening games in the garden, and of watering his flowers. Did Miss Erskine mean him not to get up at all before night?

Risely did not feel as if he could bear his imprisonment much longer. He flounced about in the bed, and flung the bedclothes into a heap, and lay with his head

near the footboard and his feet on the pillow. Then he jumped out of bed altogether, and went to the window.

It was a perfect evening for out-of-door country pleasure. The sun shone with a slanting light into the garden, and parties of gnats were gathered under the branches of the nearest tree, and the birds had not begun to think about roosting. How they did sing! Risely could see the lawn, and Miss Erskine standing on the grass, and Una beside her. Risely almost wished Miss Erskine would look up and see him, but she did not.

Risely stood gazing for some minutes. Then he pattered about the room with his bare toes, and took some jumps on the bed and off again.

All this was a relief to his feelings; but suddenly steps drew near. Risely knew in a moment that he was doing wrong. He went with a flying leap into the middle of the disordered bedclothes, and pulled a blanket over his legs.

"Ah," said Miss Erskine, coming in; "I see you have been amusing yourself."

"I'm tired of bed," said Risely.

"I meant you to be so."

Miss Erskine drew the sheets and blankets straight, made Risely lie down, and tucked him round. It looked very like going to bed for the night. Risely was almost in despair.

"Please, Miss Erskine, I want to get up."

"And I want it for you, my dear. I don't see how it is to be just yet, however."

"I expect my clothes are all dry," said Risely.

"Hardly in a state for wearing. But that is not my difficulty."

"I can wear one of my brown-holland suits," said Risely. "Only Nurse has got the keys."

"Yes; you could do that of course," said Miss Erskine.

"May I, please?"

"No."

"I want to get up," said Risely.

"And I want something else first," said Miss Erskine.

"What?" asked Risely.

Miss Erskine had finished smoothing the bed-clothes, and she sat down on the bed, and looked at him.

"Risely, what sort of a little boy have you been to-day?"

"I don't like those spikes being there," said Risely.

"That is no answer, my dear."

Risely was silent.

"Naughty or good?" asked Miss Erskine.

"I haven't been so *very* naughty," said Risely, folding the edge of the sheets into plaits. "I did want so to get over."

"Yes, and you want it so still."

Risely's colour rose.

"And you think you will have another try some day?"

"Una's gone and told you that," said Risely.

"No," said Miss Erskine. "Una told me a little of what you said to her, because I asked her, but she did not tell me that."

"I hate being beaten," said Risely.

"Do you really?" asked Miss Erskine. "That is a

good feeling in some matters. But you are very often beaten in your lessons."

"I'm not *beaten*," said Risely.

"Every time you don't learn a lesson that lesson has beaten you."

"Well, but I *could* learn," said Risely. "I don't like to have it said I *can't* do a thing."

"What people say is nothing," returned Miss Erskine. "The question is rather whether you yourself can say 'I can't.'"

"No," returned Risely. "I never say 'I can't.'"

"Then you must be a coward."

Risely looked rather taken aback.

"I'm not a coward," he said. "I'm not afraid of things."

"Not of things, but of people. I am afraid you must be a coward, dear Risely. A brave man or a brave boy will always dare to say 'I can't do wrong.' But the man or boy that does not dare to say so, is an out-and-out coward."

"I'm *not* a coward," said Risely, very much excited.

"I'm not one bit afraid. I only don't like to be beaten. And I don't. Nobody don't."

"Why don't you?"

"Because—because—it's horrid. I *can* get along that wall, and if I don't Una will think I can't."

"That is just what I say," returned Miss Erskine slowly. "I am sure from only those few words that Risely Cunningham must be a coward. Don't be vexed, Risely, but let me explain. You are afraid of what will be said of you if you don't do a wrong thing. To be afraid of words from another is just as much cowardice

as to be afraid of blows from another. You are not afraid of blows, but you *are* afraid of words. That is cowardice. You dare not say 'I *can't* do this naughty thing,' only just because you are afraid somebody else might say that you can't get over the wall. Suppose some one did say so, what harm would it do?"

Risely was so busily engaged in pulling little feathers out of his pillow that he had nothing to answer.

"It is the very worst kind of cowardice too," said Miss Erskine. "'I can't do wrong' is noble. 'I can't do right, for fear of what may be said,' is foolish and weak. If you were a really brave boy, you would say at once, 'I *can't* get over that wall—not because I am afraid of the wall, but because it would be disobedience. People may think what they like, I can't do it.'"

"I might say 'I won't,'" remarked Risely.

"Yes, but that would be 'I won't, because I *can't* do wrong.' Do you remember the story of George Washington and his hatchet?"

"O yes," said Risely, brightening up. "He was a man that fought, and he made the 'Nighted States,' in Africa, or somewhere, and he was a little boy first, and his Papa gave him a nice new little beauty of a hatchet.' I wonder if he knew he was going to be a fighting man? Perhaps he wanted to be that when he was a boy, just like I want to be a stoker—no, I mean a driver. And he chopped and he chopped at a cherry-tree, and he oughtn't to, but he didn't mean any harm, and the tree died, or at least it was going to die, and it did too. And his Papa asked little Mr. George Washington who it was that had gone and chopped and chopped away at his tree, because he wanted to punish somebody, and he

didn't know who. And he said, 'I can't tell a lie, Papa, I can't tell a lie; and I did it with my pretty hatchet.' And his Papa hugged him, and didn't beat him at all, nor put him to bed neither," added Risely, with a keen sense of the present.

"What a cowardly boy he must have been to say, 'I can't,'" said Miss Erskine.

"O no," replied Risely. "I like that 'I can't,' because story-telling is so nasty and mean. I hate stories. I wouldn't tell one, Miss Erskine, if you was to screw off my little finger to make me."

"I shall not try that experiment," said Miss Erskine. "But you must not feel too sure of yourself beforehand."

"But I have said 'can't' about that, like Mr. George Washington," said Risely. "I promised Miss Cox I wouldn't go into the orchard one whole day, and I didn't, though I wanted to most dreadfully. Miss Erskine, are those states in Africa? What are states?"

"No, they are not in Africa," said Miss Erskine. "I will tell you about them another day. How is it, Risely, that if you are brave enough to say 'I *can't*' as to telling a lie, you are too much of a coward to say 'I can't' as to disobedience?"

Risely was silent.

"Telling a lie is sin," said Miss Erskine. "And disobedience is sin. That is how they both look in God's sight. Telling a lie is also mean in man's sight. Is disobedience grand in man's sight?"

"No," said Risely rather faintly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW MISS ERSKINE HAD A GOOD DEAL TO SAY.

"I AM going to tell *you* a story now," said Miss Erskine ; and Risely gave a leap under the bed-clothes. "Did you ever hear of the Duke of Wellington?"

"O yes," said Risely. "He was a great man, and so brave ; and he beat the French, and I like him best of anybody. I mean to be a soldier some day, Miss Erskine."

"We shall see," said Miss Erskine quietly. "One day the Duke of Wellington had to go to a house where some painting was going on in the hall. And the man who was painting had strict orders given to him not to let anybody in. If people had known the Duke was coming, they would not have wanted to keep him out ; but they didn't know, and the man's orders were plain.

"The Duke came, and wanted to go into the house. The man said, 'No.' The Duke tried to tell who he was, but the man wouldn't hear or didn't heed. He knew he had to do as he was told, and that was all he cared for. The Duke then tried to walk in, and the man pushed him back by main force. So the Duke gave it up, and went quietly home."

"I wouldn't," said Risely. "I would have fought."

"Yes, and tried to get the poor man into disgrace by making him disobey. Besides, fighting for one's own rights is very undignified. The Duke was much too great a man for that. He fought for his country's rights, not for his own! He wasn't a little boy, you see. Well, when the gentleman of the house heard this, he was quite annoyed and distressed. He would not have minded about you or me, but he did mind about the Duke."

"How did he hear?" asked Risely.

"I rather think the Duke himself told him, and the man was called up to be spoken to. What should you have said, if you had been the Duke?"

"I should have told the man he was a nasty horrid rude interfering fellow," said Risely, kicking about in the bed. "Why the Duke was a real hero, and a *Duke*, and fancy him being treated like that. I'd have knocked the man down."

"Then you would have been very unlike the real Duke. The Duke never thought at all about himself. He told the man that he was perfectly right to obey orders, and that he would have been quite wrong to let anybody in, and he gave the man a sovereign to show how pleased he was with his obedience."

"A whole sovereign?" said Risely.

"Yes, a whole golden sovereign."

"But the Duke did try to get in."

"Yes, at first. Just at first I suppose he did not understand what strict orders the man had had."

Risely lay and thought.

"Obedience is a grand thing and a beautiful thing," said Miss Erskine presently. "It is only little boys and

empty-headed ignorant men who think there is anything grand in disobedience and wilfulness."

"The Duke didn't have to obey," said Risely.

"He had to learn to obey before he could learn to command," said Miss Erskine. "Every soldier must do that. And even when he became commander-in-chief, he still had to obey the Queen and the Government."

"Do sailors have to obey too?" asked Risely.

"Indeed they have. Disobedience is very sharply punished in the navy. Soldiers and sailors have to obey orders in a moment, and never to ask why."

"Gentlemen don't obey people," said Risely.

"Every true gentleman knows how to obey. Many gentlemen have to obey others who are over them in one way or another; and all have to obey the laws of their country; and all ought to obey God."

"I think I'll be obedient," said Risely. "I should think it was nice to be like the Duke."

Risely had been so interested as to forget all about the garden, but now he cast a longing glance at the window.

"We have not got to the bottom of the matter yet," said Miss Erskine.

"What matter?" asked Risely.

"This that you have done to-day. I want to dig a little deeper."

"Dig what?" asked Risely.

"What do you think that going on the wall to-day was in God's sight?"

Risely felt uncomfortable.

"It was *sin*," said Miss Erskine slowly. "It was a dark stain upon your soul, Risely, which nothing can ever wash away except the blood of the Lord Jesus."

Risely looked quickly up at her, and down again.

"Have you asked Him to wash it away?"

"No," said Risely.

"Then the black stain is there still. And God sees it."

"I don't think I feel it," said Risely.

"Shall we ask God to make you feel it, and to wash it away? for you could not go into heaven with that stain unwashed away. Nobody can go into heaven who is not all white and clean."

"Is that the only stain I've got?" asked Risely wonderingly.

"I am afraid not. Have you ever disobeyed before, or said unkind words?"

"Yes," said Risely.

"Each time there was another stain. Have you ever asked the Lord Jesus to wash away any of those stains?"

"No," said Risely, "I didn't know I had to. And some of the times were ever so long ago."

"But if the stains are not washed away, they are there still. And nobody can wash them out except the Lord Jesus with His own blood."

"I shan't see Him doing it, shall I?"

"No, but if you ask Him, you will know that He does it, because He has promised. And the Lord Jesus always keeps His promises."

Miss Erskine stopped and looked at Risely.

"Only there is *one* thing," she said. "We can't ask to have the stains washed away, unless we mean to leave off doing the things that bring stains."

"I don't mean to get on the wall again," said Risely.

"I promise you I won't, Miss Erskine."

"Then we will ask the Lord Jesus to help you to keep that promise as well as to wash you clean."

Miss Erskine let Risely get out of bed, and she knelt down, with the little boy kneeling beside her, and she prayed to God for him in simple words. She spoke so earnestly and lovingly, and seemed so to want that Risely should be a different boy, that Risely felt quite tearful. He had never heard any one pray like that for him before. And when they got up, he put his arms round her and said,—

"Miss Erskine, I love you; and I do mean to be good."

"I hope you will, dear," said Miss Erskine gently.

"It won't be an easy fight, Risely, but God will conquer for you, if you ask Him."

Risely stood quiet a moment and then said: "Mayn't I dress this evening?" glancing down at his white night-dress and bare toes.

"Yes," said Miss Erskine. "You shall have out one of your brown-holland suits. I think I may allow a game in the garden before your bed-time."

"I feel as happy as happy can be," said Risely.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME.

MANY months went by, with no particular event to break the quiet passing of time. Yet the little Hillside sister and brother had never known a happier autumn. Generally the approach of winter had been with them a dismal matter, but this year they found it possible to be happy indoors as well as out. They were almost always busy, and almost always merry.

Miss Erskine loved them, and they loved her, right dearly. They loved her so much that they did not like to put her to pain ; and while Una would have done anything to please her, even Risely tried, for her sake, to do what he was told, and to get on well with his lessons.

It is not to be supposed that in those few autumn months Risely became all at once changed into an entirely good and obedient little boy. Una had her faults still, and so had Risely his. Risely had much to fight against in natural character, for his will was strong, and he had been allowed far too much of his own way. Sometimes still he was passionate, and sometimes idle, and sometimes he tried his old plan of tyrannising over Una, and conceit was by no means rubbed out of him.

Still, a marked change might be seen, for Risely did now really *wish* to do right. He was sorry when he had been naughty, and he often tried to fight against his faults, and to pray for help, though not so earnestly as Una did.

Two or three days before Christmas a small cart full of holly was brought to the house by Miss Erskine's order, and busy hours were spent in the adorning of walls and pictures. Una and Risely were greatly pleased to help, though they almost wondered at Miss Erskine thinking so much trouble worth her while. For there never had been a Christmas before, within the children's recollection, when Mr. Cunningham had not been at home, and this year he wrote not a word to either of them about expecting to return. It made the children feel rather flat, until the holly arrangements cheered them up.

A little while before tea, the hall having been cleared of twigs, and stray berries, and bits of string, Miss Erskine sent Una and Risely upstairs to get ready.

"Una," said Risely, in a mysterious whisper, as he hopped downstairs by her side, somewhat later,—*"I'm almost perfectly certain that something is going to happen."*

"Why?" asked Una.

"Because you have had to put on your best frock, and I've got on my velveteen suit; and we don't do that every day. And Miss Erskine smiles, and looks as if she knew *something*, only she won't tell. And Nurse brushed my hair ever so much extra, to make it shiny."

"She always brushes mine a great deal," said Una.

"So she does mine, a proper deal," said Risely. "She brushed me an *extra* deal to-night. And I think there's

going to be something particular, somehow. Nurse told me I was to go straight to the drawing-room, and not to put my head into the dining-room."

"So she told me," said Una.

"I dare say we're to have a little treat," whispered Risely. "Look, there's Mattie going in. Oh—h!"

"What?" asked Una, for Risely's eyes were starting out of his head with intense observation.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Risely. "Why, Una, she's taking in the pepper-castor and the mustard-pot, and we don't *ever* eat pepper with our bread-and-butter, nor mustard neither."

"Perhaps you made a mistake, and it was really something else," said Una.

"No, it wasn't. I saw as plain as plain could be. I wonder if we're to have dinner again to-night, instead of tea. I shouldn't mind that. I like dinner."

"I like tea best," said Una.

"Not if there's JAM-TART," said Risely, with relish in the tone.

"Yes, I do," said Una.

"Una," said Risely, "I want dreadfully to go and have one peep in. And it wouldn't take a moment."

"O no, you don't, because you mustn't," said Una. And like a wise little sister she seized his hand, and pulled him along with her straight into the drawing-room.

Miss Erskine was seated there, dressed in her black silk, with a pretty blue ribbon round her throat. She said,—

"Now we are ready."

"Ready for what?" asked the children.

"And it is quite time," said Miss Erskine. "I was afraid you would be down late."

"Late for what?" Risely begged to know. "O Miss Erskine, you're so dreadfully *mystere-irious*."

Miss Erskine laughed quietly, and went on working.

"Miss Erskine, is something going to happen?" asked Risely.

"Yes," said Miss Erskine. "Christmas is going to happen."

"But I mean this very evening," said Risely.

"Yes," said Miss Erskine. "Tea is going to happen."

Risely looked at Una, as much as to say,— "It won't be dinner then."

"But we don't eat mustard and pepper at tea," he said.

"And I saw them going into the dining-room."

"Well, no, we don't," said Miss Erskine.

"Are we going to have mutton-chops at tea?" asked Risely.

"No; but somebody is going to have beefsteak-pie."

"Me!" said Risely.

"I am afraid my lessons in grammar are thrown away," said Miss Erskine, shaking her head. "No, not you."

"Papa!" exclaimed Una.

Miss Erskine put up her finger.

"Listen! I hear something."

The wind was giving sleepy sighs round the house, and at first the children heard nothing else. But suddenly there came a muffled sound of carriage-wheels, and of horses' hoofs, upon the snowy ground.

Risely gave a leap.

"It's Papa. O I know it is Papa."

"O I am so glad. *Mayn't* we both go out?" cried the children.

"Not while the front door is open. The wind is bitter."

Una stood still with a deepening flush upon her cheek, and Risely raced round like a small madman.

"Hallo! Where are you all?" asked Mr. Cunningham's voice, and he walked in.

But he did not walk in alone, and at that Miss Erskine was no less surprised than Una and Risely. He had a little girl by the hand, and a tall boy came after.

"Homer! O it's Homer," gasped Una, clasping her hands.

"Here, my dear, I have brought you a little cousin to play with," said Mr. Cunningham.

Una forgot everything else; even her father—even Homer. She had never in her life before had a little girl of her own age to stay in the house with her. She drew close to the child, touching her tenderly, as she might have done to a glass vase. The others looked on amused.

"Kiss her, Una," said Miss Erskine.

Una obeyed, with great gentleness. Then she began unfolding the thick red shawl which was wound round the little figure, and taking off the fur-trimmed hat, and pulling off the thick gloves.

A fair-haired child stood before her, nearly as tall as herself, slender and small-limbed, with a shy pursed-up mouth, and a pair of roguish dark eyes. Una took hold of her for another kiss.

"Are you my cousin Carrie?" she asked softly.

"Yes," said Carrie, just opening her lips, and shutting them again.

"I'm so glad you have come. O I'm so glad! I

have never had a dear little girl with me before, and I shall love you so. You'll love me, darling, won't you?"

"Yes," said Carrie.

"I wish Alice had come with you," said Una. "I wonder she didn't."

"She's ill," said Carrie, and the roguish dark eyes were full of tears in a moment.

"O don't cry," said Una pleadingly, putting both arms round Carrie. "Don't cry, darling. I expect she'll soon be all quite well again. You know Homer was ill, and he got well, and numbers of people do. And perhaps Alice will come here too some day. And you won't cry, because we'll love you so, and I'll try *so* hard to make you happy."

Carrie returned the kisses, and even slipped her own arm round Una's waist. Mr. Cunningham was talking to Miss Erskine, but his eyes wandered to his little daughter, and if he smiled he was touched too. Risely sat astride one of his knees, and Homer stood watching the two little girls.

"And we'll play nice games together," said Una. "I have got some dolls—and, do you know that there are two sweet robins, who come every morning for some crumbs of bread. And you shall put out the crumbs every other morning instead of me, because Risely and I take turns."

"Are they tame?" asked Carrie.

"They aren't *very* shy," said Una.

"Homer once found a little young starling, when he went a long country walk one day," said Carrie. "And it died."

"That was a long time ago," said Homer.

"Couldn't you feed it?" asked Una.

Carrie shook her head. "It could not eat," said Homer.

"And I cried when it died," said Carrie. "Didn't I, Homer?"

"Oceans," said Homer.

"It's so beautiful to have you here," remarked Una with great content.

"'You' is plural, I hope," said Homer, gravely tying together a brown and a flaxen curl, one from Una's and one from Carrie's head. "Stand still—don't struggle. Now you are friends. You can't get apart."

"I hope we *shall* be friends," said Una very earnestly, while trying to shake herself loose.

"Una, I think you had better take Carrie upstairs to get ready for tea," said Miss Erskine, after speaking with Nurse. "She will sleep in your room, and Mrs. Wyatt will kindly arrange to sleep elsewhere. Homer is to have his old quarters."

Una was charmed, and danced off with her little companion. Homer followed, laughing, to untie the locks.

"I am putting rather a charge upon you," said Mr. Cunningham to Miss Erskine. "But I felt sure you would not object. In fact I have asked them to stay until all danger of infection is over."

"Indeed, I am most glad. It will be a great enjoyment to Una, and the dear child has worked so hard that she deserves the pleasure."

"Harder than my lazy little son here, I am afraid."

"Yes—harder. Still, Risely has done much better of late. He has really tried. What a good thing those two

were from home when Alice was taken ill. I don't think Homer looks well."

"His father was over-persuaded to allow school again after Michaelmas, and of course he has done too much."

"And he and Carrie were away for change?"

"Yes. Just before the Christmas examination, for which he was working up, the doctor stepped in, and forbade him to go on. Rather a disappointment for Homer. He was sent to a friend's house in the next village for ten days, and Carrie went with him."

"Was Alice taken ill last week?"

"It was not pronounced to be scarlatina until Sunday—the day before the two were to have returned. They stayed on where they were, of course, but the lady had a house full of guests arriving, and nobody knew what to do. My brother-in-law wrote to me, and I received the letter this morning—the first I had heard of Alice's illness. I went straight to Lissolm, saw him in the garden, settled everything, and brought Homer and Carrie away with me."

"You were prompt," said Miss Erskine.

"No time to lose. But you see I could not possibly send you word beforehand."

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW HOMER TOLD A STORY.

UNA and Carrie sat together at tea-time, and chattered softly, almost without a pause. By the time tea was over, however, Carrie seemed so sleepy that she was taken straight off to bed. She was only eight years old, and the journey had been long.

Una stood by and looked on, while Nurse undressed the tired little girl. She quite loved Carrie already, and liked very much to be with her.

"I must say my prayers," Carrie remarked, when her night-dress was on.

"Yes, my dear," said Nurse, and she stood back and waited, while Carrie knelt down. But presently there was the sound of a sob, and then of a second, and Carrie rose, with wet eyes and heaving chest.

"What is it, darling?" Una begged to know, with comforting hugs, and the only word that came in answer was "Alice."

"She's ill," said Una, looking at Nurse. "Poor Alice is ill. But she'll soon be well, won't she? Don't cry, please, Carrie—please don't. I expect she'll get well *so* fast."

Perhaps tiredness and a feeling of strangeness had as

much to do with the tears as anything else, but they refused to stop. Carrie sobbed on in spite of all that Nurse and Una could do ; and presently a voice said at the door,

"May I come in?"

"O Homer, do come," said Una in distress. "Carrie is crying so."

"What's the matter, Carrie?"

"I want Alice," sobbed Carrie.

But she seemed well contented to have Homer. Nurse had rolled the red shawl round Carrie to keep her warm, and Homer sat down on the bed, and took her on his knee. Carrie nestled close up to him.

"Once upon a time," said Homer—and he stopped.

"Once upon a time,"—repeated Homer. "My dear Carrie, if you keep up that series of gentle sniffles, you'll disorganise my story."

"I won't," said Carrie.

"Listen then. Once upon a time there were two cats. One was black with a grey tail, and one was grey with a black tail. Each wanted the other's tail, because she thought it would suit her complexion better than her own. Have you a complexion, Carrie?"

"I s'pose so," said Carrie.

"Yes, but it will be a frightful colour if you cry all night," said Homer. "That was what the cats did. They set to and cried—and they cried, and cried, and cried to such a tremendous and unlimited extent, that they became in fact a spectacle to the whole neighbourhood, and everybody said, '*Look* at those cats!' So the cats were ashamed and ran away, and their eyes were so blind with tears that they could not see. One had, his grey tail

pinched off in a cupboard, and the other had his black tail nipped off in a trap. But for all that they couldn't exchange, and having to go tail-less for the rest of their lives, it was decided that Carrie positively *must* go to bed and to sleep—enough tears having been already shed."

"Yes, Homer," said Carrie meekly. "I'll be quite good, only don't go just yet, please."

"I'm going to pitch you into bed," said Homer.

It was a gentle mode of pitching. Carrie lay after, with wide-open eyes, clasping his hand.

"Just one minute," said Homer.

Then they were all silent. Homer sat looking gravely at the wall, and Una fancied he must be thinking extremely hard about something. He had gained a tint of brown in his complexion, but he was pale still, and his eyelids had a heavy droop, and the old sparkle seemed to have died away out of his eyes.

"Master Homer looks very tired," said Nurse presently. "Can't you let him go, Miss Carrie?"

"He isn't tired—are you, Homer?" asked Carrie.

"I'm tired of little girls' tears," said Homer. "Now we are going to say good-night—not one word more, Carrie."

Carrie submitted, sighed, and shut her eyes. Homer went away, beckoning Una to follow him.

"Will she go to sleep?" asked Una.

"In half-a-minute. She will be merry enough to-morrow."

"It is so delightful having you here," said Una.

"And you don't mind coming, do you, Homer? It isn't as if Alice were very ill, is it?"

"It's a mild kind, they say."

"What is?"

"The scarlatina."

"Is that what Alice is ill of?"

"Yes."

Homer stopped at the staircase window, where a cold view of blue moonlight and white country was to be seen. Snow had ceased falling, and clouds were almost gone. Stars were twinkling brightly out of a dark sky, and groups of trees cast darker shadows on the pure snow. Homer knelt with one knee on the window-seat.

"Is scarlatina the same as scarlet-fever?" asked Una seriously.

"No. Yes. No, not always. Most people say not."

"People don't die of scarlatina, do they?"

"No, not often."

"Because there was a little girl who died of scarlet-fever in the spring," said Una. "O I am very very glad poor Alice hasn't got scarlet-fever. Aren't you too?"

"Don't you go and talk to Carrie like that," said Homer.

"Not about the little girl?"

"No, nor scarlet-fever."

"No, I won't," said Una. "She mightn't know the difference, and then she might be frightened about Alice. Isn't it very cold here?" And Una shivered.

"Yes; don't wait for me."

"Don't you mind the cold?" asked Una, looking at him in surprise, for the tone was curt.

"No; that hot drawing-room makes my eyes burn so."

Una stood gazing at him, half pitying, half perplexed, and he stood up.

"Well, if you won't go without me, I must come too."

"O no, please," said Una, holding back. "Please, Homer dear, I didn't mean to vex you."

Homer took her hand, and walked downstairs, without another word. Una's eyes were full.

"I wish you wouldn't. Please don't. I didn't mean that I was in a hurry. And I could have gone. Please stop."

"No, don't bother."

The drawing-room being reached, no more could be said.

"So here you are at last," remarked Mr. Cunningham. "Come to me, Una; I have seen nothing of you yet."

Una sprang on his knee, and buried her face on his shoulder. He caught one glimpse of two eyes swimming in tears, and that was enough. Supposing it to be a fit of sympathy with her little cousin, he stroked her hair, and asked no questions. Homer took a seat opposite, and dashed into a talkative mood. He told stories, made fun, and excited Risely into shrieks of laughter. Nobody, indeed, could help laughing — not even Una.

Miss Erskine was the only person who saw through it all. She did not hold back from the fun, but an hour later, when Una and Risely had gone to bed, and Homer had vanished upstairs "to unpack," she remarked,—

"Homer looks very anxious to-night."

"That boy! Anxious! His spirits are only too high."

"I thought the merriment was very much forced. You don't consider his sister seriously ill?"

"Impossible to say as yet. I spoke with the doctor; and he said that it appeared to be of a mild type, but that Alice is of a particularly feverish constitution. She is a bad subject for anything of the kind. He certainly had a grave manner, in talking of her."

"Homer would not know all that."

"I had to tell him. He gave me no peace till I had repeated everything that the doctor said. To tell the truth I was rather surprised at his good spirits this evening. He always seems so much attached to his sisters, that I fancied he would be more uneasy. Boys never realise danger, however."

"Is it danger?"

"Not immediate. But we can't tell from day to day what is coming."

Miss Erskine was surprised no longer at the look she had noted in Homer's face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW TO PLAY WITH DOLLS AND SNOWBALLS.

HOMER was the first to enter the dining-room next morning. Breakfast not being fully laid, he stood at the window, looking out upon a snowy world, while Mattie went to and fro. Presently she disappeared, and a timid hand touched his.

"Hallo, Una!" he said, turning round.

Una looked up in his face without a word.

"I say, what time does your post come in? I can't remember."

"It doesn't often come; because there aren't often letters," said Una.

"But when there are?"

"Breakfast time," said Una.

"Never so early as this?"

"O no. And I dare say the snow will make the postman late."

Homer gave a sigh, and then pulled Una's curls.

"You look as solemn as a judge this morning. How is Carrie?"

"O she slept so sound that Nurse wouldn't wake her, and so she isn't dressed yet. She is as merry as can be, and keeps jumping all about the room. And I'm going back to her, only I came down, because——"

"Because of what?"

"I wanted to see if you were here."

"You made a tolerably good guess, since I *am* here. Did you want anything with me?"

No answer. Una's chin went down into her chest suspiciously.

"Eh?" said Homer, gently pulling it up. "Hallo! My dear Una, there is certainly something in Hillside air which affects little girls' tear-bags."

"I didn't know I had any tear-bags," said a smothered voice.

"One to each eye, of course," said Homer gravely. "Not quite big enough to hold a gallon of water each."

"O Homer! you are laughing at me."

"Well, would you rather I should cry with you? What is it all about?"

"I thought—I thought—you—you were—were angry—with me," came in broken tones.

"I? What *do* you mean?"

"Last night!" sobbed Una.

Homer had to consider.

"What! coming downstairs? Nonsense, you little goosie!"

"I thought—you spoke—as if—"

"You thought all wrong. I was just tired and disagreeable—that is all."

"You weren't disagreeable," said Una indignantly.

"Seems rather as if you had found me so. Don't be *too* tender-hearted. It isn't healthy."

Una was much comforted. She could look up again into Homer's face.

"Nurse said once that you were the very most tender-hearted boy she had ever seen."

"She must have seen an uncommonly limited number. Is it all right now, Una?"

"You didn't really mind," said Una wistfully.

"I was not an atom vexed with you, so don't have such fancies again. No more showers to-day, mind. Here come folks."

Miss Erskine appeared, and began making tea. Risely and Mr. Cunningham followed, and Una ran away for Carrie. She brought back a rosy-cheeked merry little maiden, so full of movement as to be like a doll set upon springs. Carrie's first rush was to Homer, but he turned her round, and made her say her "good-mornings" properly. Then followed prayers.

"Post seems late to-day," Mr. Cunningham remarked, when breakfast was nearly over, having noticed how constantly Homer's eyes went to the window. "I suppose you are expecting news."

"Father writes every day," said Homer.

"What are you all going to do with yourselves this morning. Hardly weather for ladies to walk far, unless the sun comes out. Don't you get to books, Homer."

"He's promised to teach me snowballs," said Risely, biting off a large piece of bread and butter.

"Snowballing," remarked Homer.

"That's what I said," responded Risely. "It'll be jolly fun. I'm so glad Homer has come."

"And I'm glad to find a transformed savage," said Homer.

"I'm not a savage," said Risely.

"No, not now."

"Nor I wasn't ever," said Risely. "Was I, Miss Erskine? Why, a savage has a scalp!"

Of course there was a burst of laughter. Risely said it so very innocently.

"You needn't laugh, because I *know* it," said Risely. "The savages cut off each other's scalps, and hang them on their waist-belts. And I'm not a savage, and I wasn't one ever. I was only a naughty boy sometimes."

"Risely is perfectly irresistible," said Miss Erskine, getting back her voice with difficulty.

"Don't you know everybody has a scalp?" asked Homer.

"No," said Risely; "it's only savages have got it; and I haven't one."

Homer forgot to laugh, and forgot to explain to Risely his mistake; for the postman was trudging past the window through the snow, leaving deep footprints on the white surface.

Risely went off like a shot, and brought back quite a packet—some for his father, one for Homer, and one for Miss Erskine.

"What news?" asked Mr. Cunningham, and Homer put the letter into his hand.

"Hum! ha! not bad," said Mr. Cunningham slowly, as he read. "Regular course of the disease must be gone through. We can't expect anything else. Hum! I didn't see the postscript." This was lower. "Well, there are sure to be ups and downs. Don't leave the sheet lying about. Some say paper may carry infection."

Homer rose and dropped it into the fire.

"Don't you want to read it again?"

"No, I know it."

"By heart? Ah, you have a young memory. Don't think too much of that, now."

Homer shook his head slightly.

"Come, take a little breakfast. Ham—egg—tongue? I dare say there is some cold beef downstairs. Nothing at all? You are not right to follow a starving system."

"I can't help it."

"Has Homer got a letter from Papa?" asked Carrie.

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Cunningham. "I hope we shall hear in a few days that Alice is better, but it is an illness that doesn't turn very quickly. Come, I think we have all done."

There was a general move. Una went softly up to Homer, as he stood looking out of the window, and whispered,—

"Please, is Alice very ill?"

"I don't know," said Homer, turning his head away. "Nobody can tell anything yet. Don't talk about it, Una. I can't be teased."

Then he stopped and gave her a kiss.

"I am not cross with you, so don't think that. Where is Risely? He wants a lesson in snowballing."

The two little girls stood at the window to look on. It was a highly amusing scene. Risely's handfuls of snow flew about wildly, generally missing their mark, while Homer's firm balls rarely failed to hit.

Risely was in a great state of excitement, and shouted all the time with glee. The game lasted long, but after awhile it came to an end, and Homer looked in at the door to say,—

"Risely and I are going for a walk."

"Don't overdo yourself," said Miss Erskine. "You are sure you really wish it?"

Risely's voice shouting behind, "He is going to take me for a *splendid* long way," drowned Homer's answer.

The intention seemed to be fulfilled, for the two did not turn up again until the second bell was ringing. There was a great hurry to be in time, and then it was found that Homer's head was aching so violently with the snow-glare as to make sitting up at table a matter of impossibility. Miss Erskine took him to lie down in the drawing-room, and left him there in quiet, while Risely described with great gusto the morning's succession of wadings and scramblings through fields and drifts. "He said his head ached, but I didn't like to give up, so we went a good round," Risely confessed.

"Then I think you were a selfish little boy," said Mr. Cunningham gravely, thereby checking chatter.

After dinner Una brought out her dolls for a game with Carrie. None were very new, though some were very old, and most had suffered ill-usage at the hands of Risely. Wigs were lacking in particular. Still the little girls enjoyed them. Una instructed Carrie in names, ages, and characters. One was naughty, and had to be propped up in a corner; and one was ill, and had to go to bed; and all were hungry, and required their dinner.

So a white duster was spread on a box, and a broken set of small "dinner-things" was arranged thereon. Hot joints and vegetables were left to the imagination. Presently Homer came slowly in, and sat down to watch the children, with a pair of heavy yet amused eyes.

"Have you been lying down enough?" Miss Erskine asked doubtfully.

"I can't sleep, thank you."

"What are you two after?"

"We're playing with the dollies," said Carrie, skipping from one foot to the other. "Look, Homer dear—that is Una's most darling doll of all, because her own Mamma gave it to her when she was quite a weeny little girl. And she loves it."

Homer's boyish mind must have found some difficulty in the fact of love being lavished upon so scratched and soiled a piece of wax. Yet he understood the matter too. He looked into the dull eyes, and observed the battered nose, holding the doll lightly but not contemptuously in one hand.

"Una loves it," repeated Carrie. "And her very own Mamma gave it to her. And it *was* pretty once, and now it's only dear."

"What is its name?" asked Homer dutifully.

"Lady Annabella Maria," said Una.

Homer moved his eyebrows.

"And this is my best china doll," said Una. "But you are a boy, so of course you don't care for dolls, and Risely doesn't either."

Caring or not caring, Homer actually set to work, and played with dolls and little girls for one whole hour. Risely, coming in, was amazed, but condescended to join. Never before had those same dolls been made to act so many characters as they acted thereafter in Homer's hands. The little girls and Miss Erskine laughed till they were tired.

Perhaps an hour of such amusement was as much as

boy-nature could be expected to stand. Risely became inclined to tease, and Miss Erskine advised him to get his paint-box. Homer threw himself on the sofa and dropped sound asleep.

"Pretty well for somebody who never can sleep in the day-time," said Mr. Cunningham, entering the room just before tea.

"I can't—at home," said Homer, rather ashamed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW THERE CAME ILL NEWS BY POST.

CHRISTMAS was over, and for three or four days accounts had been slightly better. One morning letters came early. Homer read his in silence, passed it to his uncle, and then put it in the fire. That was all that passed, but Miss Erskine felt sure something was wrong.

Till breakfast came to an end, nothing was said. Mr. Cunningham had an engagement at a distance, which obliged an early start. Before leaving he said in a low voice to Miss Erskine,—

“Look after that boy, please. Don’t let him sit and think. Bad account to-day.”

“Very bad?”

“Hardly a grain of hope. If she should drag through the next twenty-four hours, there might be a change for the better. But they did not expect her to live over this morning. Don’t tell Carrie. No need yet.”

Miss Erskine’s heart ached for the brother. Going back to the drawing-room, she found him seated on the sofa-arm, very white, but laughing and talking, while the children were clustered round in high glee.

“O Miss Erskine, Homer is *so* funny; you can’t think!”

"O Miss Erskine, we want to have a game of hide-and-seek all over the house. May we? Homer will play."

"Anything you like," Miss Erskine hastily answered, only wishing to make the day pass for him as best she might. Yet she felt half sorry, when she saw the wild game of romps that followed. Homer was the life of the party. The house had not resounded with such shrieks for years past. Miss Erskine did not like it. Alice might be dying at that moment—or at any moment. Yet what could she say? She saw it was Homer's only hope of keeping up.

About an hour later the game extended into the garden. Snow had disappeared in a thaw which set in on Christmas Day, but a keen frost had returned during the last twenty-four hours. It was sunshiny, however, and wraps being hastily donned, Miss Erskine made no objection to a garden-race.

After a while Homer's turn came again to hide, and this time nobody could find him. The children searched till they were tired, and Miss Erskine hunted with them, through garden, orchard, and surrounding fields, but in vain.

"I think you had better give up, and he will come back presently," she said.

"But it would be nicer to find him," said Una. "Do you know, Miss Erskine, I think Alice must be ever so much better to-day. Homer is *so* merry."

"Is he, dear?" said Miss Erskine sadly.

"Yes, just like last time he was here. He has been so different till to-day. O I do wonder if he has hidden on that bank beyond Cowslip Field, where I once took him on a Sunday."

"He would hardly hide beyond your bounds, for it

would not be fair. But you may take a look to satisfy yourself."

Una set off on her excursion alone, with a pair of rather tired little feet. The air was sharp and clear as it came against her warm cheeks. Now and then she called Homer's name, but there was no reply, so she gave that up, and pressed on in silence. If Homer had hidden in this direction he would be easily enough found.

So it proved. Leaving the meadow behind, she went to the little slope beside the stream, where she and Homer had sat together one hot Sunday afternoon. And there upon the grass lay a figure, the face pressed downwards on two folded arms, while smothered sobs broke out at intervals.

That could not be Homer! Homer never cried.

Una drew softly nearer. Her little feet made no rustle on the grass. ♦ It *was* Homer. The outline of the figure was not to be mistaken.

Una was greatly awe-struck. She had not known before that big boys ever cried—least of all, Homer. Once only had she seen him near doing so, and that was when she had spoken of his mother. But what reason could he have now? Only a little while back playing so merrily! How had the change come about?"

"*Please don't,*" a little voice said at length.

Homer started indignantly to his feet. Tears were gone in a moment. He could hardly bear that his sorrow should have been broken in upon, even by Una. She saw the flash of anger in his face.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"O Homer!" faltered the little girl.

"Don't cry. Do you want me to go on with the game? Who is hiding now?"

"No,—nobody. O Homer, it isn't Alice, is it?"

Una held his hand tightly between her own. He turned his face away.

"I thought she was better, because you were so funny and merry. Isn't she?"

"No."

Una had never heard him speak in that tone before.

"Not even a little?"

"No."

"Won't she be soon?"

"No. They thought yesterday that she was dying."

The words were spoken quietly, but Homer could hardly bear the sound of what he had himself said. His hand was drawn sharply from Una, and went up to his face. Una spoke, but he did not answer, and his smothered distress quite overcame her. She burst into tears.

"Don't, Una. I wish you would not," he said at length; and he sat down and took her on his knee. "*You* needn't cry."

"O Homer, I'm so sorry."

"Never mind; don't talk about that. Shall we go on with our game?"

"O no. I wish you wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what?"

"Pretend to be merry," were the words in Una's mind, but she could not get them out. She only squeezed his hand caressingly. Homer did just what she wished he would not do, for he began trying to make her laugh; and presently they went back to the house, chatting quite

cheerfully. But the two faces told Miss Erskine something of what had passed.

The postman next morning was eagerly looked for. Mr. Cunningham had decided to prolong his stay at home for a few days, not wishing to be absent in the event of that happening which was feared. Homer came down to breakfast with eyes that spoke of a sleepless night. No one ventured to say much to him. When the postman trudged past the window he flushed crimson, and was gone before Risely could move.

Coming back with an open sheet in his hand, he gave it to Mr. Cunningham.

"Miss Erskine can see it," he said, and he went out of the room.

Not the worst, as they had at first feared. The report was simply as bad as could be. Alice lived still, but any hour might be her last. The doctors were astonished at her lasting so long in that state. They had all but given up hope.

Carrie's questions had to be parried as best they might. Breakfast over, Miss Erskine poured out a cup of tea, and went in search of Homer. She could not find him, but presently he appeared, and made himself the children's slave for the morning. He went where Risely wished, swung the little girls, mended toys, and allowed himself not one moment for thought. After dinner—the morning having dragged past somehow—Risely came to Miss Erskine with a request that they might "go somewhere."

"Who, Risely?"

"All of us. Homer wants it, Miss Erskine. He says he is tired of the house and the garden."

"Where shall we go?"

"O Homer will take us. You needn't come, if you would rather not. I told him about Farmer Westward's, up on the hill, and he wants to start off there straight."

"That is too far for Homer."

"O no; he says he wants a long walk awfully, Miss Erskine. He'll take care of us all."

"I think I must come with you. Where is Homer?"

"Just at the door."

Miss Erskine went to him, and found that the wish seemed to be genuine. "I don't know whether I am wise to give way," she said. "But perhaps it is best for you."

Homer flushed up suddenly. "Miss Erskine, do you think my father would telegraph?"

"You mean, if——"

Homer made a quick movement.

"I don't know. I should think it probable," she said gently.

"I can't stand looking out for it all the while. Away at the farm, it *can't* come for an hour or two."

Miss Erskine thought this a curious mode of comfort, but she had learnt the wisdom of letting people be unhappy in their own way.

"We will start at once," she said. "And Homer—don't give up hope."

"No—I'll be ready as soon as you," said Homer, vaguely using the first words that came to hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW LAUGHTER DOES NOT ALWAYS SHOW JOY.

THE walking-party set off early, as they had need to do, if they meant to be back before dusk. Carrie was in wild spirits, scampering about like a kitten, and Risely dived into ditches, and scrambled up banks, for no earthly purpose except to show how cleverly he could do it. Una felt sad, and she walked soberly by Miss Erskine's side, following Homer with her eyes, as he made merry with the others.

"I wish Homer wouldn't laugh so," she said to Miss Erskine. "He can't feel like laughing in his heart, and I do wish he wouldn't. Why does he?"

"I suppose he wants not to think too much about Alice. People have different ways of bearing sorrow, and that is his way of trying to be brave."

"Carrie doesn't know how ill Alice is," said Una. "And I haven't told her, and I won't. She says Homer is always so kind, and she says he is so fond of Alice. I think it would be dreadful for Homer, if Alice died. Do you think she will?"

"I cannot tell, darling. It will be as God sees best."

"He made Homer's Mamma die," said Una. "But He let Homer get well."

"Yes, and that was a great comfort for Homer's friends. But I don't think Homer himself would have been sorry to go. You see, one after another is being called home by the Lord Jesus, to live with Himself; and whenever one goes, the rest are sorry. And yet it would be a very sad thing if none that loved Him could go to Him, just because they would be missed here."

"It would be nice if we could all go together," said Una.

"Ah, we are looking for that," said Miss Erskine, smiling. "One and another goes alone now, but there will be a day when all who love Him shall rise to meet Him together."

"To meet Him?" repeated Una.

"Yes—when He comes in His glory, to reign as King. There will not be then a few dying here and there, but all that love Him and are looking for Him, will be 'caught up to meet Him in the air,' and will be in one moment made beautiful like Himself."

"Nobody will be ugly in heaven, I suppose?" said Una.

"Nothing will be ugly in heaven. But I don't think any face is ever really ugly, if the love of Jesus is shining through from the heart. That gives beauty."

"I hope Alice won't die. I would rather she should wait till we can all go together. Will it be soon?"

"I cannot tell, darling. Nobody can tell when the Lord Jesus may come. It may be very soon indeed, or it may not be for many long years. But He wants us to be always expecting Him."

"And if Alice dies, *she* won't be caught up."

"Yes, out of her grave. We are told in the Bible that

when that moment comes, the dead in Christ shall rise first. And then all will rise together to meet their Lord, and to live with Him for ever."

"It sounds *so* happy," said Una. "I wish it would be very soon. But—oh, Miss Erskine, I *do* hope Alice won't die, because of poor Homer."

"So do I, from my heart. And yet we don't know what is best for her. If the Lord Jesus wants her now in heaven, her friends must give her up, even though they would so much rather keep her."

"Why don't you say all that to Homer?" asked Una soberly.

"Because it is not the right time. Homer knows it all, but his heart is aching so about Alice, that it would be unkind to talk so to him. If God takes Alice *He* can comfort poor Homer."

"And Uncle and Carrie too," said Una.

Then Homer came up, and no more could be said. He was pulling Risely by one arm, and laughing at him.

"Here's a boy that thinks he knows everything, Miss Erskine, and a great deal more besides."

"I don't," said Risely. "I know some things."

"So does the cat," said Homer.

"I know more than the cat," said Risely. "I can say my Latin declensions, and my French verbs, and ever so many lessons."

"Well, the cat couldn't *quite* manage a Latin declension, I suppose. 'A mouse, of a mouse, to a mouse,' would be the nearest approach. By-the-bye, I find that Risely's friend, Curiosity, has vanished from Hillside. It never came into my head till this morning to make inquiries after her black ladyship."

"She came to a melancholy end," said Miss Erskine, falling into his mood. "A warning to all inquisitive boys—eh, Risely?"

"*I'm* not inquisitive," said Risely. "The black hen was. She poked and she poked about everywhere, Homer, and she was always trying to find out what she hadn't got any business to know. And one day she came to a pot of slime, and she thought it looked nice, and it burnt her inside, and she died."

"Odd sort of slime," said Homer.

"Lime, not slime," said Miss Erskine.

"Nurse said slime, I'm sure."

"Don't be *too* sure," said Miss Erskine,

"Well, then—it was lime," said Risely. "White stuff, you know, Homer, like what the men have when they build a house at Cowbridge. And they put some in the road—what was it for?—I forget. And Curiosity went poking out there, and so it killed her."

"Dangerous thing lime, if it kills one to look at it," said Homer.

"She *ate* it," said Risely. "And it's all quite true, so you needn't laugh. She was so awfully curious she wanted to know what it was, and so she died of it."

"You forgot that important little item of the eating," said Homer.

The walk was long, but the end came at last. Miss Erskine took them all with her straight to the farm-house, and the servant showed them into a small parlour.

Mrs. Westward, a plump little woman, with rosy face, and cap-ribbons of primrose hue, came hurrying in. She was full of welcomes for her visitors. Miss Erskine had only been to see her once before, and Miss Cox had

never been at all, but when the children were younger Nurse had often taken them to see the cows milked, or to get fresh strawberries.

A large seed-cake was forthwith brought out, and Risely fell to work upon it with gusto. He began to grow excited, and rather naughty. He took a third large slice, and talked nonsense, and even made fun of Mrs. Westward's name, by saying something about "coming to Westward Ho," which did not sound polite. Mrs. Westward laughed good-naturedly, but Miss Erskine was not pleased.

Homer proposed a move into the garden, and the children went after him. Una came last, and said,—“We are to play here for a few minutes. Mrs. Westward has something to say to Miss Erskine, and then we are going home.”

“Yes, but we shall see the pond first,” said Risely. “We always do.”

“Not always,” said Una. “We didn't last time.”

“Well, we always do when Nurse brings us,” said Risely. “And I don't see why we shouldn't now. I like the pond best of all, and Miss Erskine would take us directly if it wasn't for Homer.”

“I am no hindrance,” said Homer, comparing two or three leaves which he had plucked. “I don't care where we go.”

The three children moved a little way off, and Homer heard a discussion going on, but did not trouble himself to take in the sense of it. He felt disinclined for any more fun or nonsense. Una presently came back to him.

“Homer, are you tired?”

"Rather."

"It doesn't matter. It's only—Risely has gone to the pond."

"Can't you go too?"

"No, we oughtn't to go without leave. And he says there is sure to be ice on the pond, and he has a great mind to slide."

"He will find no safe ice to-day."

"He says that. And he has taken Carrie."

Homer gave a start. "Where is the pond?"

"It isn't *very* near."

"Never mind. Show me the way at once."

"It is rather a big pond," said Una, as they hurried away. "There is a little stream of water that runs in and runs out. I told Risely he oughtn't to slide because it wasn't safe, and he said it was quite safe, because the water was so shallow. But I don't think he really knows. I heard Mr. Westward say once that the farther side was deep enough to drown anybody."

Homer quickened his pace. "Risely is in a wilful mood to-day," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW SOMEBODY WAS QUICK AND BRAVE.

"ALL the length of the kitchen-garden to go?" asked Homer.

"Yes; the pond is just across the field beyond. And there's a great big quarry a little way farther, and lots of rocks from the quarry were piled up round the pond," said Una. "That's what makes the sides so steep, except just in one part. It is so pretty in summer, though."

"This is a pretty place altogether," said Homer.

"Only the trees do get so bare in winter. I wish they didn't. Homer, won't Miss Erskine wonder where we all are?"

"You shall go back from the pond and tell her. Just show me where it is."

The two pressed on.

"I can hear Risely's voice," said Una. "He is calling out, and laughing."

Homer looked at his watch.

"We shall have to get back to the house quickly, if Miss Erskine means to reach home before dark."

"I think she did want that," said Una. "I like walking out when it is dark, if it wasn't quite so cold. Look!

Homer, the pond is over there. We shall see it in a moment now. There! you can see the tops of the little trees growing close to the edge." And the next instant Una exclaimed: "Oh! O Homer!

For two little figures were to be seen sliding over the surface of the pond, one pulled by the other, and both very merry.

"The boy is mad!" said Homer. "That thin ice!"

He dashed across the last half of the field, and reached the spot.

"Risely, what are you after? Come off directly!"

"It's quite safe, and *so* jolly!" screamed Risely.

"O do come too, Homer!" cried Carrie.

"Come off, Risely! How dare you! Come off this instant!" Homer shouted sternly, his voice hoarse with alarm; for he could actually see the ice bending beneath Risely's feet, and he dared not add his own extra weight.

"Risely, do you hear? Bring Carrie off this moment. Quick! don't stop. Come straight off. The ice will break if you stop. Be sharp!"

But Risely did stop, and that on the worst spot which he could well have chosen. He hesitated whether or no to obey, and his foot went through.

"Throw yourselves flat," Homer called, but he called in vain: Risely's presence of mind left him. He screamed, clutched at Carrie, more with thought for himself than for her, and the two went struggling down through the ice, shattering it all around them.

Homer had already determined what to do. Risely having wilfully gone to the farther side of the pond on seeing his cousin come near, the children were not far from land; but the bank on that side was rugged and

steep, formed, as Una had said, of piled-up rocks and stones.

The footing on the rock-work was insecure at any time, more especially in this wintry weather, when many pieces had been loosened by frosts, and when each little pool of water had become a pool of ice. Homer, however dashed round recklessly. There was no time for care on his part.

Una looked on in speechless horror. She had never seen any one run so fast, yet it seemed as if the two must disappear under the water before he could reach them.

Just in time. One point of loose rocks jutted out farther than the rest. Homer's foot was on it, not waiting to test its safety. He could not delay for that. He caught the lowest branch of a slender ash overhanging the pond, leant far over, and with his other hand grasped Carrie. Risely had hold of Carrie, and he clutched Homer's arm convulsively.

More than that Homer dared not attempt. The slightest overstrain, and branch or footing must give way. He had very uncertain support in either quarter. The stones moved slightly under his feet, warning him not to put trust in that direction; and how far the ash-bough was fitted to endure he could not tell. Also, apart from this danger, he had not the strength of muscle needed to lift two heavy children from the water with one hand.

"Run for help—run!" he shouted to Una. "Don't lose a moment. We can't hold on long. Get men—a rope——"

Una fled with all speed. The two children had been in the water few seconds as yet, but it was bitterly cold, and Carrie's terror was extreme. Her blue lips refused

to utter a sound, and her eyes looked round wildly, while her breath came in gasps. Risely's shouts of sobbing appeal for rescue were incessant.

"Stop that noise," said Homer. "You are safe at present—only hold on tight. Risely, you must not struggle. You will have us all down together."

"O Homer, do get me out! O Homer, do please!" entreated Risely. "O why doesn't somebody come?"

When *would* somebody come? That was the question in Homer's mind. How long would it take Una to get help? His very heart sank as he thought of field, kitchen-garden, flower-garden,—of the possibility of delay in finding the farmer or his men,—of the minutes that *must* pass before any one could arrive! Was it possible that he could hold out? How heavily the moments dragged along! Why, Una could not have reached beyond the kitchen-garden yet, even at her swiftest speed. And what if her poor little trembling limbs refused to carry her fast?"

"Don't be frightened, Carrie darling," he said cheerily, with these thoughts in his mind, and numb exhaustion creeping over his frame. "I am holding you *so* tight—don't you feel that I am? Don't be frightened."

"O Homer, do get me out! Do, please—oh, please!" begged Risely.

"I can't yet. Una will bring help."

"Could you *just* pull us out safely?"

"I can't. The bough might give way."

"Couldn't you just swing us round—just up on the rocks? O Homer, do! I know we shall be drowned O do try!"

"I can't do it. Keep quiet."

"Can't you swim if the bough breaks?"

"Hush! I can't do anything more than I am doing now."

He had a ghastly sense that the breaking of the bough would be certain death to them all. Further effort seemed altogether out of his power. The strain was becoming more than he could endure. Hanging completely over the water, depending on one foot only, and that insecurely placed, with one hand grasping a slender bough, and two children depending completely on the other hand, his position was painfully difficult to keep up.

He began to wish he had thrown himself into the water at first, and trusted simply to swimming. Dangerous work, with two children ready to cling and drag him under water—but it might have been successful. All strength for any such attempt was gone now.

He could only hold on, and pray that he might hold on to the last. Every muscle ached sharply, and each moment seemed a minute in passing. Drops broke out on his forehead, and a cold faintness swept over him. He clung to the branch with a grasp of desperation, but a feeling of powerlessness was passing into his hand, and the fingers seemed to him to be loosening, despite his best efforts.

"No one coming yet, Risely?" he asked in a hollow voice, which sounded to himself as if it came from far away.

"No, I can't *think* why they don't," said Risely, with angry impatience. "Homer, you aren't holding *me* one bit. You are only holding Carrie, and my fingers are so cold, I can't hold on. O I know I can't."

"You must," said Homer faintly.

"I wish they would get us out—O I wish they would," sobbed Risely. "It is *so* cold. Homer, I didn't say right. I told Una the pond was shallow, and I didn't know—I don't really know one bit. O Homer, I don't want to be drowned. I wish I was good. O I don't want to be drowned. O Homer, *don't* let go," added the child in terror, noting for the first time Homer's white face and half-closed eyes. "You aren't going to sleep, are you? O don't! O do wake up. O don't let go."

Risely shrieked loudly in his growing alarm. To Homer each moment was now one long agony of exertion. The rocks seemed slipping under his feet, his fingers slipping from the bough, the children slipping from his grasp. The whole weight of himself and the children hung upon his left hand, for he dared not trust to his footing.

Was that left hand holding on still? He caught himself wondering in a half-unconscious way whether it had yet let go. The water rose and fell like the sea before his eyes, and a dark shadow seemed now and then to blot out everything around him. Alice's face took the place of Carrie's. Was she living yet? Was she dead? Was death near for himself? What if it were? Christ his Lord was near! That thought stood out clearly. Then for a moment he forgot where he was. Sky and earth seemed mingled together, and everything went round with dizzy speed. Yet still his desperate clutch above and below never slackened.

Voices sounded close. Homer could scarcely hear them for the confusion of sounds in his own brain. The farmer's shout had no response except from Risely. He hurried round the pond in consternation, followed by two

men. Miss Erskine, Mrs. Westward, and Una waited on the opposite bank.

"Hallo, sir, here we are," the farmer called. "Friends at hand. Hold on one moment more, that's a brave young gentleman. The water's deep thereabouts. Look sharp, men! The rope! He's about done for!"

How to rescue the children was the question. They could not be reached from the shore, and no second foot could find place beside Homer's. Farmer Westward tied the rope round his own waist, and flung the other end to one of the men.

"Draw us out, Jem. See what you're after. Joe, look'ee to the young gentleman. Sharp, now!"

One gallant plunge, and the farmer had both children in his grasp. He was not much of a swimmer, and sputtered about helplessly, while Jem pulled in the rope. The three were quickly and safely landed.

Joe did not neglect his part of the business. But for a firm grasp on his arm from behind, Homer would have gone down into the water the moment the strain relaxed. He was drawn back, and dropped half-fainting on the rocks.

Farmer Westward's voice aroused him:

"Hurt, sir? That was a tough business, but you did right bravely."

Homer struggled half up. "I am all right," he said. "Where's Carrie?"

"The little lassie?—gone to the house, and Master Risely too," said Farmer Westward. "If I had the handling of that young gentleman, he shouldn't forget this day in a hurry. The doer of the mischief is like to come off most free."

"How is *she*?" asked Homer.

"Seemed chilled and dazed, and no marvel. She don't look worse than you do," said the farmer. "Do you think you could walk a bit with my arm now? Joe's gone to carry the little missie; and I told him to make Master Risely run—save a cold-catching, maybe. You're little weight, sir. *I* could carry you. Jem's off to let Mr. Cunningham know all about it."

Homer objected to be carried, and walked home so steadily as to surprise the farmer. After reaching the little black sofa, however, he had a very vague sense of anything or anybody present for half an hour.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW THE DAY WENT ON.

NOT a moment was lost in hurrying the children to the farm, removing their wet clothes, and putting them to bed. Risely hung his head, and chattered his teeth, and had nothing to say. Carrie trembled and shivered still in speechless fear, and could not be content unless clinging to Miss Erskine's hand. Una, with eyes full of tears, and limbs that would not cease to shake, ran about and was helpful to everybody.

Miss Erskine felt very anxious about Carrie, a delicate child, liable to chills, and likely to suffer from the shock. Risely seemed none the worse for his bath, though he looked rather grave and uneasy, and submitted to bed without his usual protests. But Carrie was sick and poorly with the shock, and she sobbed incessantly for Papa, for Alice, for Homer.

Miss Erskine thought that seeing Homer might comfort her, and she sent Una to inquire after him. Una came back with the message that Homer was tired.

"Is he coming to Carrie, my dear?"

"I don't know, Miss Erskine. He said she ought to stop crying, but he didn't move."

That was hardly like Homer, and Miss Erskine felt uneasy.

"He looks tired," added Una. "Mr. Westward said he had given him something to do him good. And he said I was to tell you that one of the men has gone to tell Papa and Nurse, and he expects they'll soon be here. And Homer said I was to say 'All right' about him to you."

Not quite satisfactory, Miss Erskine thought, but to leave Carrie then was hardly possible. There seemed little hope at present of sleep. Carrie cried on persistently, would not look at Mrs. Westward, and would not listen to stories. That lasted nearly an hour. Then at length came a change. The sight of an ancient doll, fished out of some old closet by kind Mrs. Westward, diverted the little girl's thoughts, and she consented to be left by Miss Erskine for "just a minute."

The room downstairs was nearly dark. Door and window both stood open, and Homer was sitting on the small sofa, with his face resting on the table in front. Miss Erskine's hand upon his forehead made him start.

"Has Carrie stopped crying?" he asked.

"Just now she has. It was a great shock for the poor child. How cold you are here!"

"I don't feel cold."

"I have been afraid you were not feeling well."

Homer made no answer. "Pain anywhere?"

"Only aching all over."

"Not any strain, Homer?"

"O no, it's nothing."

Miss Erskine smoothed back the hair from his forehead with a gentle touch. Homer's closed eyelids flushed, and a tear stole out.

"Poor boy, you are tired to death," she said. "It has been a hard day for you."

Homer sat upright, looking straight before him, with a certain strained expression about his eyes and lips, visible even in the dusk.

"Miss Erskine, did you see anything of it?"

"Of what?"

"It," And she understood.

"I came up with the men. But the worst must have been at an end then."

"Not till he had hold of Carrie. I thought—I thought it was all over with us."

"You could not have held on much longer. The strain must have been terrible."

"I didn't expect to be able so long. It seemed hours."

"God has been very merciful," Miss Erskine said, with full eyes.

"I couldn't help thinking of father—if *all* of us had been taken. And I was wondering—whether Alice or I would get there first."

Miss Erskine's voice failed her.

"It seemed so near," he said in a lower voice; "almost more near than when I was ill. But I couldn't help thinking of father."

"How thankful *he* will be," said Miss Erskine.

"Carrie wants you; don't stay," were Homer's next words.

"I wish I could. You want me too, I think."

"Miss Erskine—just one thing. If there should have been a telegram——"

"Nurse would have sent it after us."

"Would she? Kirby is engaged this afternoon. Nurse would expect us home at any moment. I wish I knew.

If I did but know!" the boy said heavily, resting his face again on his arm. "I *wish* I knew."

In her own keen anxiety about the children, Miss Erskine had forgotten to realise the weight of the other fear pressing upon him.

"I wish you did," she said. "This waiting is so sad for you. But Nurse cannot be long now in arriving."

Homer shook with smothered sobs, not one of which was allowed utterance.

"You are completely worn out," she said, distressed for him. "I think you ought to be in bed."

"O no; I must go back to Hillside to-night. There is the morning post, you know."

She would not discuss the question then, and she dared not remain longer away from Carrie. Finding how severely his head was aching, she made him lie down, and sent Una to bathe it. Poor Miss Erskine felt half distracted with her longing to be upstairs and downstairs at the same time. She began to wonder at hearing nothing from Hillside. Una crept noiselessly in on her errand, and was greeted by a request for lights.

"Won't they hurt your eyes?" a trembling little voice asked.

"No. It doesn't matter if there is any trouble in getting them."

"O no;" and Una ran away in search of the farmer, who soon brought back a substantial lamp. Arranging the stand, screwing up the oil, and persuading the wick to burn, occupied some minutes.

"Miss Erskine thinks Papa *must* come soon," said Una softly. Homer made no answer. "Don't you feel any better?" asked Una.

"I don't think *you* do," said Homer, making his first use of the light to examine her face. "Poor little woman."

Una struggled hard to master herself, but the quivering of lips, hands and voice was beyond control. A word more would have upset her altogether. Homer saw that, and rather dreading a tearful scene, he left her alone and closed his eyes. Una went on hurriedly applying one spongeful after another of cool liquid to his forehead.

"Take care; we shall have an inundation," said Homer dreamily.

"Do you like the light?" whispered Una, feeling it needful to say something.

"Better than the dark. I kept fancying every moment that I was going down under water."

"O Homer, they're coming."

Wheels sounded outside, and Una's nervous start nearly caused an overturn of the cup in her hand. Homer stood suddenly up, and at the same moment Mr. Cunningham hurried into the room, unwontedly flushed and excited.

"What is all this?" he said. "Pond—ice—drowning. What does it all mean? Una, my child, *you* are not hurt. Thank God! Where is Risely? Upstairs? So he is the culprit. Homer, you *do* look ill."

"Nobody is hurt," said Homer. "Carrie is knocked up with the fright. Has Nurse come?"

"Yes; gone to Miss Erskine. How about you?"

"I am not hurt. Carrie and Risely were the only ones in the water."

Homer stopped short, a strong shiver passing over him.

"And you pulled them out?"

"No, Mr. Westward did that."

Homer's effort to keep up came to an end. He sat down, and rested a white face on his hand.

"Papa, it *was* Homer," said Una. "It was all Homer. He kept up Carrie and Risely till Mr. Westward came, and he had to hold on to a bough, and it was dreadfully hard."

"It was just touch and go," said the farmer's voice from behind. "I pulled 'em out, did I? Wonder how much pulling there'd have been in the question if this young gentleman hadn't been there. Tell you what, sir, you owe the lives of both of 'em to him."

"And to Mr. Westward," said Homer.

"It was as gallant a deed as ever I saw," said the farmer. "Holding on with a death-grip, nigh fainting as he was. It's an awkward place to fall in there. And nobody else was at hand. If he hadn't been so quick, there'd have been little enough left for me nor anybody else to pull out, by the time we came. Two little bodies, maybe."

"He can't stand that," said Mr. Cunningham in a low voice, as the boy shuddered again, and Una broke into a sob. "Words cannot thank you, Mr. Westward. I owe the life of my boy to both of you—to you and——" He laid his hand on Homer's shoulder. "What can I say? Gratitude is a cold expression."

"Nothing, only don't talk about it, please," muttered Homer.

There was a very evident wish to have the subject dropped. Homer could hardly stand conversation in connection with it as yet.

"What are we to do with him?" asked Mr. Cunning-

ham, as they stood looking down at the boy's colourless face.

"*I—don't—know,*" said the farmer. "'A good basin o' gruel,' wife says ; but he'll touch nothing."

"I'm crack-brained ! What am I thinking about ?—forgetting like this !" exclaimed Mr. Cunningham, to the amazement of his hearers. He fumbled hastily in his pockets. "There's a telegram for you, Homer—came just before I left, so I opened it. Don't be frightened. Alice is improving. This is all it says : 'Improvement to-day. A. has taken a turn for the better. Great hopes.'"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW PEOPLE FELT AFTERWARDS.

HOMER's dazzled eyes could read nothing, though the yellowish thin paper, with scrawly writing thereon, was put into his hand. He gave a look up at his uncle, said—"Thank you,"—crumpled up the sheet in his fingers, and hid his face in the sofa-cushion.

Nobody disturbed him for a while. Una stood looking at him, crying quietly, and wondering how it was that she felt still so inclined to tremble and cry, when Alice was better, and Carrie and Risely were safe. By-and-by Miss Erskine came into the room; and she sat down beside Homer, put one hand round Una's waist, and laid the other softly on Homer's brown hair, asking: "Haven't you a word to say to us?"

Homer lifted his head with a smile, though only to lay it down again.

"So tired still?" she said. "See, here is Una crying for you because she is so glad."

"There's nothing to cry about now," said Homer. "How is Carrie?"

"Asleep, with her head on Nurse's arm. She looks pale."

Homer put forward the telegram-paper. "Look," he said. "Have you heard?"

"Mr. Cunningham told us. I don't think we can be thankful enough."

"*Enough*," Homer repeated. "O no."

"How do you feel now? I am afraid this headache will not go till you have had a good night."

"I can't sleep. There is nothing but water all round me, the moment I shut my eyes."

"Ah, that is such a natural feeling," said Miss Erskine quietly, showing no uneasiness, whatever she felt. "You are over-wrought. But people have all to think of bed now."

"Who is going home?" asked Homer.

"Nobody till to-morrow morning. The Westwards are most kind. It would be unsafe for Carrie and Risely, and you are quite unfit for the drive, and Una would be lonely."

"I should be better for it," Homer declared, but he was overruled.

Miss Erskine would have been glad to call a doctor in both for him and Carrie. It was a Hillside fashion, however, never to have medical advice before the necessity was unquestionable, and Miss Erskine was obliged to conform to this rule. Nurse had prudently brought with her night-dresses for the children, foreseeing possible needs; and a messenger was despatched in the dog-cart for whatever else was required.

Nobody in the house, except Risely, had much sleep that night. Everybody was over-excited. Miss Erskine sat up with Homer, and Nurse with Carrie; and Mr. Cunningham went round at least three times to the different bedsides, to assure himself that nothing was going wrong. Indeed, if he took off his clothes at all that night, he must have had enough to do with taking off and putting on.

Risely slept and snored peacefully, notwithstanding past danger, and despite the fact that he was to blame for all the trouble. He had felt very unhappy about this, and nobody had had time to speak to him seriously yet, beyond the uttering of a few stern and grieved words by his father. But nothing ever kept Risely awake.

Carrie slept and dreamt, and woke and cried by turns, all through the night; and Homer never slept at all, as Miss Erskine had feared would be the case. As for poor little Una, nobody had had any leisure to attend to her, or soothe her, after the terrible alarm she had had, and she shed quite a deluge of tears into her pillow. She did drop asleep at last, but only to have such dreadful dreams that it was quite a relief to wake again.

And there stood Miss Erskine by her side. Una sprang up and threw herself—a little white figure with ruffled hair—into two kind arms.

“Poor little woman,” said Miss Erskine tenderly.

“O Miss Erskine, may I get up?” said Una. “I can’t bear dreaming so.”

“Quite time to get up,” said Miss Erskine. “It is past eight.”

Una felt ashamed. “I didn’t mean to sleep so long,” she said. “I heard the clock strike two and three, and Carrie was crying—for I heard her through the wall. Have you been up a long time, Miss Erskine?”

“I didn’t go to bed,” said Miss Erskine. “Homer was too poorly to be left.”

“Isn’t he better this morning?”

“Not so restless, but very tired, poor boy. Your Papa is with him just now.”

Miss Erskine sat down on the bed, holding Una in

her arms, and Una felt more comforted than she had done yet.

"It was a dreadful day yesterday," she said. "Wasn't it dreadful, Miss Erskine? Oh, only think—if Homer *couldn't* have held on?"

"God gave him strength to do it, my darling."

"I do keep on thanking God," whispered Una, hiding her face. "Homer saved my own dear pet Risely—he did, Miss Erskine."

"Yes, but we had tears enough yesterday," said Miss Erskine, lifting a wet little face in both hands. "You mustn't go on crying, Una, because it makes us all feel bad, and you have to be such a useful little girl to-day."

Una tried hard to wink away the tears, and to pull her face into the right shape. But the moment she had managed to do so, up came a picture of the pond, with Risely going down under the water, and sobs *would* break out again, despite her best efforts.

"I'm so sorry. I wouldn't if I could help it," she said brokenly. "Miss Erskine, mayn't I see darling Risely?"

"Yes, if you won't wash him away with a little river of salt water," said Miss Erskine, and that made Una laugh. "He is in bed now having his breakfast, because Nurse thought it best. And Carrie—"

"O please tell me how Carrie is?"

"Why, Carrie seems better than we expected. She has the sparkle back in her eyes again this morning. Nurse is afraid she has taken rather a cold, but she does not look half so poorly as Homer does. Come, I think you had better dress, and you and I will have breakfast together, and then you shall see Risely."

That made Una hurry on with her dressing as fast as possible. She felt as if the day before had been like a dream, and she wanted to see Risely with her own eyes this morning, to assure herself that all was right with him.

The little brown Bible was not at the farm, so Una could not read in it as usual, but Miss Erskine repeated to her a few verses from a Psalm—all about praise and thanksgiving. Una felt sure she had chosen that Psalm on purpose. And her little simple prayer that morning when she knelt by her bed, was very full of thankfulness. The old baby-prayer had been dropped long before. Una had learnt now to ask in her own words for what she wanted.

Then Miss Erskine took her hand and led her down into the parlour, where an ample breakfast had been laid. All the time that they were eating, good Mrs. Westward kept bustling in and out, trying to think of something else that they might like. Una was quite amused, and forgot to cry any more.

Breakfast over, they went upstairs together to Risely's room. And Una ran to the bed, and threw her arms round her brother.

"O Risely darling! O Risely darling!" she said.

Risely looked rather astonished, but he hugged her back again, as much as she could wish.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "You're not going to cry, are you? Is Alice worse?"

"No, Alice is better, I hope," said Miss Erskine. "Una is only thinking, Risely, what *might* have been yesterday, but for God's loving mercy on our wilful little boy."

Risely's face took a grave set, and he glanced at Miss Erskine uneasily.

"I suppose Una means if the branch had broken," he said. "But then you know, Miss Erskine, Homer can swim—I know he can."

"Yes, but he was too faint to have done so. I don't think you quite know how great the danger was," said Miss Erskine gently. "If the branch had broken, Homer must have fallen into the water, and you would both have clutched hold of him, and would all have sunk together. Many a strong man has lost his life in that way. And Homer had no strength left to hold off two struggling children, and swim with you both to shore. He could not have done it."

Risely leant his chin on his two hands, and looked backwards and forwards from Miss Erskine's kind serious face to Una's tearful eyes.

"Papa has told me I was very naughty," he said.

"And you think there is no need for me to tell you again?" said Miss Erskine.

Risely did not say anything for a moment. His face worked, and Una, reading rightly a glance from Miss Erskine, slipped quietly out of the room.

"I didn't mean ever to be naughty again," Risely began then in a half-crying voice. "I didn't mean to, Miss Erskine, and I can't think how it was I went on the pond at all. It just seemed as if I must; and it was a horrid nasty shame of me. And I oughtn't to have made you all so sorry. And Nurse says Carrie has got a cold, and nobody knows what will happen to her yet; and she says Homer's as ill as can be this morning—and—and—I *do* hate myself just."

Risely winked vehemently, and tried desperately hard to keep back his tears.

"It seemed as if you must do what, Risely?"

"Must go to the pond," said Risely. "Papa says it is disobedience, because I knew you wouldn't let me, though you hadn't told me. And I thought I wasn't *ever* going to be disobedient again. And I do feel so horrid."

That was the beginning of a grave talk, which Risely did not soon forget. Miss Erskine wished him not to forget. He was very sorry, and she was very gentle with him, but she wanted him thoroughly to understand and feel what terrible sorrow may come from one little act of wilfulness or disobedience.

So she talked to him about that dark "*might-have-been*" which weighed so upon Una's mind. She made him think how it would have been, if *he* had by any means been saved, and Carrie lost, and perhaps Homer too.

"For if he had fainted and fallen into the pond before the men came, nothing could have saved him," she said. "What would your life have been after, Risely? Why, you could never have smiled again. And yet the thing that you did was not in itself worse than you have often done before. Any time there might be some such consequences."

"I won't ever again—I won't ever again," Risely said earnestly from time to time, and once he added: "I *do* mean to ask God to make me do right."

"People don't always think of what may come *after* a wrong deed," said Miss Erskine. "Sometimes it looks such a small thing. When Eve took the fruit which God had forbidden her, she little thought what she was doing. I dare say it seemed to her rather a small matter—just to take or not to take. But, you see, God had said, 'THOU SHALT NOT,' and to take the fruit was disobedience, and

disobedience was sin. It didn't matter what the fruit was, or how good it might be to eat. She broke God's command, and that one sin just opened the door for all the great tide of sin and sorrow which has been rushing through the whole world ever since. But she could not look ahead and see the consequences of her sin any more than you and I can do. Risely dear, don't forget that when you give way to wrong-doing, you *never* know what the end of it will be, or how much misery you may be working for yourself and others."

Risely cried afresh, and held Miss Erskine's hand, and said again how sorry he was. And then he told her how terrible it had been, while in the water, to think that perhaps he was just going to die, and to feel that he did not know whether he was ready. "If I had been like Homer and Una I shouldn't have minded half so much," he said. "I did wish I hadn't been so naughty."

That made Miss Erskine talk more to him about his sin towards God, which was far worse than any wrong done to Carrie, or Homer, or anybody. And she told him lovingly how ready God is to forgive abundantly, for the sake of Jesus His Son, and how Risely would need to ask for the power of the Holy Spirit in his heart, day by day, to keep him from disobedience and forgetfulness.

Risely listened thoughtfully, and seemed to feel it all in a way that he had not done before. Then Miss Erskine allowed him to dress, and the first thing he did was to go and tell Mr. Cunningham how sorry he was for having gone on the pond. He carried about a sober little face for some hours after, and he and Una clung together a good deal, and felt as if they could not bear to be apart.

About midday a closed fly came to the door, and Una and Risely were made to put on their walking-things and get in. Then Carrie was brought downstairs, not only dressed warmly, but rolled round and round with a big blanket, from which her face peeped out quite merrily. She was placed in the fly, and Nurse stepped after, and they drove straight to Hillside, where Carrie was again made to go to bed.

Homer seemed in the morning quite too unwell for the drive home, and it was almost settled that he should stay another night at the farm. He was particularly anxious, however, to get back to Hillside, and after an hour or two of sleep in the afternoon he brightened up a good deal. So the fly was again sent for, and Mr. Cunningham, Miss Erskine, and Homer followed the others home.

Thus ended the pond adventure. But Miss Erskine had two invalids on her hands for several days. Carrie did not begin to shake off her cold, and Homer did not begin to recover from his exertions, for a week or more afterwards.

Every day there came good accounts from Alice, cheering them all, and doing Homer no small good. She was soon reported as entirely out of danger.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW UNA HEARD WHAT WAS TO BE.

ONE mild rainy day, about three weeks later, Miss Erskine sat writing letters at the centre table in the dining-room. Homer was leaning back on the sofa, with an open book, which Una and Carrie were busily endeavouring to wrest from his grasp, while Risely executed a gallop upon the farther sofa-arm. For this was an old-fashioned sofa, with two high arms.

"Risely, you are jogging us most fearfully," said Homer.

"Why, you don't mind," said Risely.

"If you are quite sure of that fact, you may as well go on."

"Do you?" asked Risely.

"It doesn't exactly bring a sense of enjoyment."

Risely sat still.

"You don't pull hard enough, Carrie," he said. "*I* could do it."

"Try," said Homer, laughing.

Risely flung himself down, and set to work in good earnest. But while the little girls had met with only gentle resistance, just enough to prevent success, Risely found himself entirely baffled, and held down helplessly.

"Homer, I say! That isn't fair! I say!" shouted Risely.

"What do you say?"

"It—*isn't*—fair," gasped Risely.

"What *isn't*?"

"You won't let me be free."

"Free to take my book? I don't want it taken."

"You've no business to read. It's against rules," said Risely, with convulsive struggles to escape.

"Whose rules? Yours?"

"Everybody's."

"Everybody hasn't authority over me. Hallo, you piece of mischief!"—as, in an unguarded moment, Carrie stole up behind, twisted the book from his grasp, and fled.

Homer rolled Risely over on the floor, and went after her like a shot. Carrie and book were captured and brought back in half-a-minute.

"Come, I begin to see that you are better," said Mr. Cunningham, who had just entered the room.

"It's a duty to society to bring these mischievous specimens into order," said Homer.

"I'll relieve you from the burden of one among them. Una."

"*Una* is no trouble," said Homer.

"So much the better for me. I am going for a drive, and I want her for a companion."

"Not me, Papa?" cried Risely.

"No, not '*me*'—only Una."

"But there is room behind," said Risely.

"I am going to bring a ham and some buns from Cambridge. So the back seat will not be quite empty."

"I could hold the ham, Papa."

"I shouldn't wonder if you could drop it too," said Mr. Cunningham. "Run and dress, Una."

Risely was rather displeased, but he had to submit with the best grace he could muster.

Presently the dog-cart stood before the door. The white horse was in his friskiest mood, whereas Risely looked depressed.

"Splendid day," said Mr. Cunningham. "Just fit for a drive."

Risely heaved a sigh.

"People must take their turn," said Mr. Cunningham.

"Little boys can't always have the best of things."

"I don't, I'm sure," said Risely, dolefully.

"That's right. It wouldn't be fair."

Mr. Cunningham lifted Una up, and took his seat beside the little maiden, reins in hand. Una looked down sorrowfully at Risely, and Homer whispered:

"Don't you spoil all her fun. Get up an agreeable expression, just for a moment."

Risely gulped, and made a grimace which did duty for a smile.

"Una is always so glad when Risely has a pleasure," said Miss Erskine.

"I'm glad too," said Risely, and he actually did give her a real smile.

"That is a kind boy," said Miss Erskine, as the dog-cart drove off.

Una waved her hand till the home-party could no longer be seen. Then she began to feel what a delightful thing it was to be driving so fast through the fresh breeze, with her father by her side. How briskly the horse went, and how he whisked his tail and tossed his mane; and how the birds were chirping out their delight at coming spring.

"Papa, the hedges are quite budding," said Una.

"Quite," said Mr. Cunningham. "It is very early for such mild weather. They are sure to be checked by frosts; but after all, time is getting on fast. Easter will be here before we know where we are."

The very name of Easter always caused Una's heart to sink. And she felt almost sure from the tone of her father's voice that he had a particular reason for saying what he did. Why should he have spoken about Easter at all just then, without a particular reason?

"Yes; Easter will soon be here," repeated Mr. Cunningham. "The months are going very fast."

Una gave one look up in his face, and then her hat went down and down, till nothing beyond crown and rim could be seen by Mr. Cunningham.

"Come," he said presently, "you are not enjoying the view."

The rim of the hat rose slightly.

"Pretty, isn't it?"

"Yes," said a most sedate little voice.

"What are you thinking about, Una?"

"Papa," said Una.

"Well, my small girleen."

"Papa, you said—you said—*Easter*—"

Una's voice failed.

"So I did," said Mr. Cunningham quietly. "I am thinking a good deal about Easter just now."

"Papa, I thought—perhaps—Papa dear, you didn't mean——"

"I should not wonder if I meant the same as you thought."

Mr. Cunningham paused, and then made up his mind to have it out at once.

"Risely is getting to be a great boy now. And the Easter term is a good one for beginning, in my opinion."

Down went the hat-rim lower than before. No sobs came, but Mr. Cunningham felt uneasy. He checked the horse's quick trot, and by putting his hand under Una's chin managed to get one glimpse. Such a sorrowful quivering white little face! Mr. Cunningham could not stand it.

"Una, my dear!" he said.

Una made no reply. She was quite past speaking, and her poor little hands were wrung together.

The horse walked slowly and more slowly still.

"Is it such a very dreadful thought?" asked Mr. Cunningham. "Why, all boys have to go to school sooner or later. You wouldn't like Risely to live at home always, and to become either a soft molly-coddle or a conceited little tyrant. He would be sure to do one of the two—the last most likely. He wants knocking about among other boys. He has to learn his own worth, and have the conceit taken out of him. He will never be a thorough man without the right training, and he will never have that here. He gets too much of his own way with us, and he can't have cricket, and foot-ball, and hard lessons, and boyish companionship. Una, I am quite sure you love Risely so much that you want him to have whatever is good for him."

"Homer told me he ought to go," said a stifled voice.

"Homer is quite right. You would like Risely to grow up like Homer, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Una, sighing. "But Homer doesn't go away to school."

"No; because there is a large one within easy distance of his home, so he can be a day-boarder."

"I wish—Risely——"

"Wish Risely had not to go? So do I for my little girl's sake, but not for Risely's. He needs school very much. And what fun you will have with him in the holidays," added Mr. Cunningham, making the horse trot faster again. "They will always be coming round."

Another sigh answered him. Una was trying hard to be brave, but she did not feel much comforted.

"Then there are letters to be written every week. How nice it is to think that you have kind Miss Erskine to take care of you! Only think if you hadn't."

Una knew that would have been much worse. But still Miss Erskine, however dear, was not Risely. She felt very sore at heart.

"Now, having disposed of that business, I have another little plan to mention," said Mr. Cunningham. "This plan is for Easter too. Where do you think I want to go?"

"Where, Papa?"

"Why, to Switzerland. I am thinking of spending six weeks or two months there."

That did sound dismal. Risely to go to school,—Papa to go abroad!

"I intend to take Homer with me," said Mr. Cunningham. "Indeed, I really thought of the trip first on his account. We owe him much, don't we, my little girl?—and a few weeks in the mountains will do him no end of good. I expect he will come back quite strong again."

"It will be very very nice for Homer," Una tried to say.

"Yes; and at that time Miss Erskine will go home for her holidays. That is the best time for her, I find, and it

will be for me too. I tell her she must take a good seven or eight weeks."

Una felt bewildered. "Papa, must I stay all alone with Nurse here?" she asked, too dismayed for tears.

"Why, no. Nurse has not had a good bout of holiday-taking for years, so I have promised her a whole month at Easter, to spend among her relations. Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Cunningham, pretending to give a great start, "what *are* we to do with *you*, my dear? Miss Erskine, Nurse, Papa, all away! Don't you think Hillside would be rather lonely?"

Una began to understand, and her eyes sparkled.

"You wouldn't care to see the Swiss mountains too, would you?"

"Papa! O Papa!"

The horse was going fast; but Una scrambled up on the seat, put both arms round Mr. Cunningham's neck, and hugged him rapturously.

"I really think I *must* tuck you into a corner of my portmanteau," said Mr. Cunningham. "It wouldn't be quite safe to leave you all alone at Hillside."

"Papa, you don't really mean it. Do you, *dear* Papa?"

"Really and truly," said Mr. Cunningham. "How will you like to see Mont Blanc?"

Una clasped her hands and did not know what to say.

"But, O Papa, Risely won't see it all."

"My dear, Risely will have what he cares for a great deal more than Mont Blanc—eighty-five boys for his schoolfellows."

"So many! I think he *will* like that best," said Una. "But I shouldn't."

"And then, when we come back from Switzerland,

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

2. Once the problem is identified, the next step is to define the objectives and goals of the project. This helps to clarify what needs to be achieved and provides a clear direction for the team.

3. The third step is to develop a plan or strategy to address the problem. This involves breaking down the problem into smaller, manageable tasks and determining the resources needed to complete each task.

4. The fourth step is to implement the plan. This involves putting the strategy into action and monitoring progress regularly to ensure that the project is on track.

5. The final step is to evaluate the results of the project. This involves comparing the actual outcomes with the objectives and goals to determine the effectiveness of the project and identify areas for improvement.

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"And you like to think about Him, and talk about Him?"

"I like to think," said Una.

"Not to talk?"

"Sometimes," said Una softly.

"Will you try to talk to me sometimes, Una? I should like it, my little girl, very much."

Una's promise to "try" was very low. But she did not forget it—though they talked of little besides Swiss mountains during the rest of the drive.

THE END.

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